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GOING FOR SARAH
BY
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CHAPTER I

JULY 7, 1941:

As soon as the war between Russia and Germany erupted my parents began to plan how to bring my sister Sarah home from Wolozin, where she was living while working and studying.

Mother began: "If she doesn't come by herself soon we shall have to go for her."

"It is very dangerous for her to travel by herself as it is for us to go for her." Father responded.

"Yes, I understand that," Mother agreed.

"The Russian army is in full retreat, Father continued. "All the highways and the by-ways are jammed with tanks, trucks and soldiers. The German Luftwaffe dominates the skies. When all the chaos tapers off a bit, we will be able to think more clearly about how to accomplish it."

"There is nothing to think about!" Mother insisted. "We have to go to Wolozin and bring her home. That is, if she is still alive. That is all there is to it!"

Leyzer der shmid (Leyzer the blacksmith) had come running in to tell us that the oldest daughter Yentel was on a truck retreating towards Minsk. She had yelled to him at the top of her lungs to convey that message to her family, and he lost no time doing it.

Mother became very uneasy. Yentel, her eldest child, had come home from Stoloce, where she worked as a photographer. Wolozin was in a different direction from Stoloce, which lay north of our shtetel. Mother felt torn.

"You had better go to the street that leads to Stoloce Town and see whether you can spot her," she ordered Father. "I'll go the other way. Perhaps Sarah is arriving with the retreating troops." She directed me to take care of the two little ones.

Father protested vigorously. "Please," he begged, "it is simply impossible to go anywhere now. Don't you see what is happening? There is shooting out there, bombing, death, destruction. You'll be right in the line of fire." He turned to me:

"Please, Yankev, tell her how dangerous it is. Tell her!"

I grabbed her skirt. “You are not going anywhere," I said. The little ones, my brother and sister, imitated me and also pulled at her skirt and began to cry.

“Where are you going, Mamma? Where are you going?" Mother said: “I'll talk with the Rujewski family. We'll pay them to bring her home.”

“That is a good idea," said Father. “They are Christians. They know their way around. It will not be any trouble at all for them to go for her, and before we know she'll be on her way."

Shortly Mother returned to the house. She seized my hand and said:

“Come, Yankele, come with me to see Rujewski."

“Let Sara stay where she is," I said. “She'll only fight with us if she comes home!"

“Come, come with me. Let her get home first. Then we'll see what happens," Mother urged. I went with her.

Mother knocked at the neighbor's door. “How are you, Antia?"

“It's so nice to see you, Shoshka. In times like these we need friends." The neighbor turned to me and spoke in Yiddish. Although Yiddish was our language, not theirs, their whole family spoke Yiddish.

“How are you, Yankel? School will be open soon and you'll go back to your studies, eh? Go and play with the kids," she suggested, handing me a glass of milk.

Mother got right down to explain the real reason for her visit, telling Antia what she wanted her to do.

“Oh, is Sarah in Wolozin? How is she? Sit down, sit down, Shoshka. Catch your breath. Don't be so excited. I’ll talk it over with my husband and we'll see what can be done. In the meantime, let me make a cup of **tsikorive** for you."

The Rujewskis had been our neighbors for a good many years. Mother and Antia were especially close because they had attended school together. I enjoyed watching them and listening to their chatting.

“Don't worry, Shoshka. We’ll do our best to bring Sarah home. I'll talk to my husband." The two women kissed and hugged each other as we parted.

Mother was happy. She was all smiles as she told Father what Antia had said.

“Good. It will be wonderful to see it happen," Father said.

The German soldiers left town and a local police force was formed. Gradually, the pressure on the Jewish population began to mount.

A few days later Antia visited us to tell my parents that her husband planned to take a ride "to survey the roads", and would decide, when he returned what to do. "He wants to take Yankel and our two children along. It will appear to be a family out for a ride."

I jumped for joy. "Yes! Yes! I'll go with you! Of course I will, Antia!" I shouted. "Come, come. Let's go. Don't talk so much with my mother! You two always talk a lot!" She grabbed my hand and rushed me off.

When our horse and buggy was ready, we three children hopped in with Mr. Rujewski and we were on our way. It seemed to me that he was enjoying the ride as much as we were.

For a while the road seemed peaceful, but the farther away we got from the town, the more shooting we heard.

"It is dangerous after all", Mr. Rujewski said. "The fighting is still going on. We really should not continue." He turned the horse around.

We tried to convince him to go on a while longer to see whether the situation might improve, but he was firm: "No, no. We are going back!" Mother was disappointed with his report.

Days went by, filled with discouraging news from other villages nearby, where Russian soldiers were still resisting in the forests. We were unable to make a move.

One day Father said: "I'll go to the nearest village and talk to my Christian friends. I'll tell them what I would like them to do. Come, Yankele, we'll go there."

"I don't know why you always want to drag me along," I protested. "I'm just a little boy. The only thing I can do is run fast. How much protection can I give you?"

"If something goes wrong you can run home and tell your mother", he said.

"Yes. I guess so", I said. "Let's get going, then."

We stopped at several houses. Every one we spoke to was sympathetic. Even though we offered to pay in goods, and that was an attractive deal, the answer we got was always the same: too far and too dangerous.

There was mounting pressure from the Germans. Insult, harassment and demands for valuables became a daily occurrence. The more unsafe the situation became for the Jews, the more Mother insisted we go for Sarah.

"I'll go to Wolozin on foot. I'll find the way. I must bring my daughter home."

"Have you walked to Wolozin?", asked Father. "It's about forty kilometers through a wooded area. You'd get lost! I couldn't possibly let you go! I'm more physically able than you are. I'll go."

Father was well acquainted with the terrain. He had often worked as a photographer in those villages. Whenever there was a death, Father was called on to photograph the deceased. It had become a custom in the area to postpone burial until after photos were taken. He also took pictures at weddings in the area.

The arguing between Father and Mother about who should go for Sarah continued. "Perhaps I ought to go with father," I interrupted. The dispute came to an abrupt halt.

"You can't be serious" they said simultaneously. It sounded so funny to me to hear them both say the same thing at the same time, that I started to laugh.

"It'll be great for me to go through the woods. You know I love the woods; I enjoy watching the birds fly around from one branch to another. There are lots of beautiful birds in the woods and I love the way the forest smells. Maybe we should all go for Sara, all three of us kids- Yitzkhok and Merre-Liebe too. I'll show them where we play scavenger." (I belonged to **Betar**, a Zionist youth organization. Every so often we went into the woods for training in survival procedures and to learn how to fight. We also played games.) "I'll show you how to start a fire without using any matches."

"Yes, yes!" my little sister, who was about nine, broke in. "I want to go get sister, too." My younger brother, who was about five, began to "pack" and to throw things around as his enthusiasm gained momentum. Soon the three of us formed a circle and began to jump about happily. Our parents looked surprised. What was happening here? This was not **Betar**. This danger was real. This was a life and death situation. It was serious business.

"I don't care what it is! Death shmeth! We'll just keep going through the forest until we get to Sara." I turned to the little ones and yelled;

"Are we going?"

"Yes, yes, yes! We are".

Our parents sat down and waited until we were tired of jumping. Hands clasped, they sat and talked with each other until all three of us, exhausted, fell into their arms.

Mother spoke first. "If only we could bring your sister home! It would be so wonderful for all of us to be together again! Then, perhaps, we could all go into the woods together to have fun, and you could show us what you learned there. In the meantime, we've decided Yankele will go with Father and I will stay and take care

of the other two of you. How is that?"

The little ones looked over at me and began tugging at me and crying that they wanted to go with me.

"It won't take us long. Father and I will be back soon and we'll bring you a big, strong sister to protect us. Won't that be good?"

"It is growing dark," Father reminded us. "Soon it will be night. Time for all of us to get to sleep." While our parents prepared to send us off to bed, we youngsters clung to each other.

It was dark when I was unceremoniously pulled out of bed.

"Get dressed and prepare to go", said Mother. You and father must put on your **tfilin** before you leave. Don't waste any time. God be with you!"

"You know, Ma," I said, "you remind me of the story of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham woke his son and took him to the altar to be sacrificed. But an angel came down from Heaven and Isaac's life was spared. Nothing will happen to us, angels will watch over us. God will be with us just like you said,"

Mother prepared food for our journey. "Don't! Please, don't!" Father pleaded. "There is so little food here! Don't worry, we won't go hungry. I know all the peasants along our route and they know me. If I ask them, they will help."

It was still dark when we were ready. We glanced at the two little ones, but Mother gently pushed us back from their bedside so that we would not wake them. I saw that Father was fighting back tears. He grabbed my hand. We kissed the **mezuzah** and were off.

"You see, Father, Mother is a strong woman. She isn't crying."

We waved back to her as she gradually disappeared into the darkness of the night.

I was unable to keep up with Father and he had to slow down.

"Do you want to go back home?" he asked.

"Oh, no! Don't even think it!"

By daybreak, we were at the outskirts of our town. Half way to Wolozin, near the town of Iwieniec, Father knocked at the door of a gentile family he knew. They were very fine people and readily offered us food and shelter. Being very tired, we fell asleep at once.

We woke quite early and began to plan the rest of our walk. I listened intently to what my Father's friend had to say. What he told us was frightening. A special detachment of German troops had occupied Iwieniec. one of the larger towns in the area, and established it as their administrative headquarters.

"They are harassing the Jewish population. There is no end to the beatings. They rob and kill. Their uniforms are black and have an insignia of a skull on their hats. What they are doing to the Jews is unbelievable," he continued.

Father informed him of the route we planned to take and asked advice on how to proceed.

"We shall come home safely, all three of us. The Germans will not see us and the Partisans will not touch us, so do not worry." "Let's go," he said turning to me. Outdoors, he bent down to fix my shoe laces.

"Father, when I was in **kheder** I learned that the Jews wandered in the wilderness of Sinai for forty years. That is a long time, isn't it? What is the difference between that wilderness and this one?"

"Oh, there is a great difference. In the Sinai there were no woods, no trees to shelter the people. It was hot in the daytime and cold at night. There were no houses like the Wojczek's...only heaven and sand.

Those Jews wanted to get home, too, and God brought them safely there. Their home was the Land of Israel. We'll also come home. Our chances are better than theirs were. We have the trees to protect us from the hot sun, and the Partisans are our friends. So, you see, there is a big difference. But God is the same. He hasn't changed. Don't worry; He'll lead us on our way. We won't get lost and we'll come home safely. All six of us will be together again, with **Bobie**, too."

"Where are the Partisans?" I asked. "I haven't seen any. I would certainly like to hold one of their rifles! If we meet some, I'll ask them to accompany us to Wolozin to pick up Sara."

Father interrupted me. "We have reached the outskirts of the forest. The trail is close to the highway. The Germans are not entering the woods; they know that would be dangerous for them. The Partisans are avoiding the highway, because it is swarming with Germans, and here we are, right in the middle, between them.

"So far, so good," he went on. "Do you hear that noise? Those are the German trucks. We shall have to go deeper into the forest." The farther in we went, the darker it became. Only over the tops of the trees could the sun be seen peeping through. Father glanced at the sky.

"It is about mid-day," he said. "Let's rest right here, beside the stream. We'll remove our shoes and put our feet into the water. That will make us feel better." We made ourselves comfortable and Father offered some food.

"This is similar to what we do in **Betar**", I said. "We could just stay here for a while to breathe the fresh air." I rested my head on his thigh. In a few minutes, I was asleep. Apparently, Father slept too.

Suddenly, I was aware of two men standing over us. They were in civilian clothes, but they had rifles pointed at us. "Don't move, or we'll blow your heads off!" They searched us, then motioned to us to follow them. One man walked in front of us, the other behind. When Father attempted to say something, one of the men snapped.

"Not a word!"

I kept turning my head to look at him. Here I was with a real Partisan! Our eyes met and I started to smile at him. He motioned to me not to do that. I kept turning my head until I tripped and fell. As I rose I said, in Yiddish: "This is my father. We are on our way to Wolozin to pick up my sister." Then I switched to Russian.

"She works as a writer for ISKRA (a Russian newspaper)." I continued talking, partly in Yiddish and Russian. "Are you a real Partisan? I used to belong to the Pioneers (Russian scout movement). I can recite the pledge." I continued. "I want to be a Partisan, too. I know how to survive in the woods. I belonged to **Betar**. I learned many things. I can run fast." The man smiled. I continued on. "You are a real Partisan, with a real rifle aren't you?"

We had been walking for some time when we were ordered to halt. The men blindfolded us and led us down some stairs, then stopped us. As we stood there unable to see, we could hear someone walk in.

"What language do you speak?" we were asked in Russian.

"Yiddish and Russian," Father replied.

"I speak a few words of Hebrew; I studied it in **kheder**," I added. Our blindfolds were removed. Before us stood a tall man. "Are you a real Partisan?" I looked at him in awe. "I want to be a Partisan, too."

The man motioned to us to sit on the ground. We were in an underground camp. I could see a table, a kerosene lamp and a chair. There was darkness all around us. It was scary. I began to wonder what was would happen to us. I looked at my father. He was pale. I started to ask him something.

"Not another word!" the man snapped. "Who are you and where are you going?" Two more men appeared. We stood there naked. My father was shivering, and so was I, whether from cold or from fear I do not know.

The men handcuffed my father and led him away. I remained standing, in front of the tall man. I was so amazed, I did not know what to say. I had never seen my father handcuffed. I was frightened and shaken.

"Where is my father? Where is he? What are you doing to him?" I screamed at the top of my lungs at the man and then I began to cry. I did not stop shouting and crying until he said, "Nothing will happen to your father. Now shut up! Do you hear me? Shut up! "

I calmed down. A chair was brought in. The man motioned for me to sit. As he began to question me, another man walked in.

"Your name?"

"Yankel."

"Where are you going?"

"To Wolozhin."

"Why Wolozin?"

"To get my sister Sara and bring her home."

The other man began to interrogate me. He spoke in Yiddish using an occasional Hebrew word. I began to feel more comfortable.

What school did I attend? What did I study? Where did I learn Russian? Who was my teacher? Whom did I know in Rubiezewicze? What towns and villages were close to Rubiezewicze?

"Your father speaks German. How is it that you do not speak German?"

I began to laugh. "My father does not speak German and neither do I! I speak Yiddish and so does he! Where is he?" I wanted to see him. I was choking, but I began yelling for him again.

The questioning continued. What was I doing in the woods? The questions were repeated. I did not stop shouting: "Where's my father?"

"He is not your father!", my interrogator suddenly shouted. "You just said your father does not speak German. This man speaks German very well. You are lying!"

"Your `father' will have to stay here with us for a while."

"Oh, no! He goes with me!" I screamed, by now frantic. "My sister is alone in Wolozin. We are risking our lives to bring her home. We must bring Sarah home. That's all my Mother wants. Please let us go! My mother will die. My little sister

and brother will never stop crying. Please, let us go! We'll prove we are telling the truth! Let us go, and on the way back all three of us will return and you will meet my sister. Yes, we'll all stop here. And then maybe, later, we'll also bring Mother, **Bobie**, Yitzchok and Merre-Liebe, my little sister and brother. It'll feel good to walk in the woods and not see the Germans. Maybe then we won't be afraid. We'll all help you. My sister is a writer. She is very beautiful. And she is strong. She will help us. Mother is a seamstress. She'll mend your clothes and cook for all of you. She bakes delicious bread.

Please let us go! I can run fast. My little brother and sister won't cry if we get home. Father is a good man. He can do many things. I want to see him please, to make sure he's all right. Just let me see him. Then I'll shut up."

"If he were really your father, he would not take such a young boy on such a dangerous mission- to pick up some one somewhere in Wolozhin. If he is your father, as you say, he is a fool!"

"He is not a fool! He's a good father! He does everything he can to bring food home. He always kisses and hugs us. I love him. Please, don't say bad things about my father! It's true he didn't want to take me along, but Mother insisted he shouldn't travel alone. And I wanted to go, anyway. So he took me. Now I want to see my father. Just let us go to Wolozhin."

The two men walked out, and I was left alone in that scary room, with just a small kerosene lamp that crackled as it burned. I wondered what made it make such a noise, so I slowly and quietly started towards the lamp to investigate. A voice stopped me, unforgettable in its harshness:

"Don't move!"

I wondered where the voice was coming from. I looked around but could see no one.

The rusty door creaked open slowly and Father was brought in. I jumped at him and began kissing and hugging him. Then I ran toward the two officers, put my arms around them, and wept for joy.

"You really like your father, don't you?" said the tall one. Some day you'll visit me in Kojdanov- (a town about fifteen kilometers from my own) and you'll meet my little brother. He is your age, about twelve. In the meantime you must take care of your father and your sister." He spoke to us in Yiddish. He said something to the other officer and they led us into another underground area while they tried to advise Father about the best way to continue our journey.

"You did something very dangerous," we were told. "You fell asleep. And you were too close to the road. One of you must stay awake at all times while the other dozes off. This is very important. From here it should take five or six hours to reach Wolozin." I was listening very attentively.

"You must never walk close together. Always keep some distance from each other." Finally, the partisan blindfolded us and said: "We have to do this." Then he opened the door and led us out of the bunker. We walked for a while, hand in hand. Then he removed our blindfolds and led us back to the place where we had been found.

"My name is Hershel. I'm from Kojdanow. Your father is a good man and you are a good boy." He saluted us. I ran back to him and we hugged each other. Then he gently pushed me away.

"I want to be a Partisan," I said.

He replied, "Shalom uvrakha!" (Peace and blessings). He turned away quickly and started back while I still stood there saluting him.

"Let us go," said Father. "They kept us here for almost an entire day. I can tell by the way the sun comes through the trees that it is noon. We must arrive in Wolozin before dark. We should talk very quietly, really just whisper, and we dare not fall asleep again."

After we had walked for a few hours, Father looked up at the sun and said:

"We should rest now for a few minutes." We followed our instructions and as Father had planned, came out of the woods before it was quite dark. We were on the outskirts of Wolozhin.

"So far, so good," he said. "See that house over there? I know the good people who live there. I would always stop by whenever I was in this vicinity. I photographed their children when they were married, and also took pictures of the grandfather when he died. We are good friends."

"Fine. Let's go in." We knocked on the door. Someone looked the window, then opened the door hesitantly.

"Mr. Stanislaw."

"Oh, David! Come in, come in. Who is this youngster?"

"My son. We are on our way to Wolozin to get my daughter."

"Sh...sh...please be quiet. The Germans were here a few days ago. Yesterday the Partisans came. We are very frightened. I'll give you some food, David, but then you must go. I'm very sorry, David. There are still many Germans in Wolozin. Please be very careful."

We soon left Stanislaw's house. It was pitch dark. I did not think Father would find his way, but he kept reassuring me. He seemed to know the area well, and we

arrived safely at Uncle Aaron's house at about midnight, after twisting and turning through the streets and hiding behind houses.

Uncle Aaron was my mother's brother. He taught my sister Yentel photography, and my sister Sarah went to stay with him and his family when she went to Wolozin to work and study.

Aaron and his family were all very surprised to see us. They did not stop talking about the fact that we had come such a long distance on foot in such a dangerous time. Sarah was not at home.

"Where is Sarah? We have come to take her home."

"Don't worry. She is with a Christian family. She knows them well. They are fine people and they will not harm her."

We were very tired. Our legs ached. I stretched out on the floor and fell sound asleep. Early the next morning I awoke to see my sister sitting beside me. Her hand was holding mine. There were tears in her eyes and a smile on her face. She did not utter a word, she just kept her eyes fixed on me.

"I am glad you are here," I said. "Now we won't have to go all over Wolozin looking for you. And stop kissing me so much!"

We all sat down to breakfast. Food was scarce, but Uncle Aaron's family did their best to make us feel at home.

Forgetting for a moment where I was, I turned to Father and said: "I wanted to ask you while we were still in the woods to tell me what they did to you and why they held you for such a long time, but you kept saying `Sh...be quiet; don't talk.' Please tell me."

"I wanted to ask you the same questions. But not now."

My sister and my uncle's family became anxious and wanted to know what we were talking about. What had happened?

My father hesitated. Finally he said:

"They took us for German spies."

"Who are `they'?" my sister asked.

"Partisans", I said.

"What are you talking about?" Uncle said in disbelief.

"Please tell us all about it. Please!"

I began to relate my experience. Father listened very carefully. Suddenly he burst into tears.

"What happened? They would not believe that Yankel is my son. They were sure I was a spy. I was sure they were going to shoot me. When they finally led me out of the room in which they questioned me, one of them said, `You are very lucky to have had your little boy with you! He was very convincing about who you really are!'"

Realizing that Sarah was becoming very anxious, Father stopped and tried to put an end to the conversation.

"Don't worry, Sarah", he said.

I had the last word. "I promised that if they freed all three of us, we would return to them and become Partisans." Everyone laughed.

I became friendly with Uncle Aaron's children. They kept asking me all sorts of questions about the Partisans. Sarah kept holding my hand. Finally I protested.

"Leave me alone!", I said.

Sara then started to put her things together. While Father talked with my uncle and aunt, our five cousins Sarah and I enjoyed ourselves. The cousins showed us around.

Then Sarah said: "Come, Yankele! We'll say good-bye to my friends. You'll meet them and they'll see my little brother."

Uncle interrupted her. "You are not going anywhere! You know how dangerous it was for us to come to get you? The danger is still there. We were very fortunate that nothing happened to us."

I did not get to meet Sara's friends. But we did get some rest.

All seven of our relatives woke early to bid us good-bye. We were very sad when we hugged and kissed each other. As we parted and started for home they insisted upon giving us some food to take along.

"We hope to see you again some day", we said.

"Don't forget to say hello to my sisters, Sorke, Rokhel and Shoshke and their families. God be with you!"

The morning was chilly, dark and eerie. "We'll have to watch out for the city ruffians," Sarah warned. "They are hunting Jews in the streets".

By the grace of God we made our way out of Wolozin without incident. Sarah knew the town well. She also was acquainted with some of the hoodlums.

"I went to school with a number of them," she said. "In those days they were my friends. Now they've changed completely. I run into them from time to time, but they don't bother me. I have been fortunate, and I still am. You came such a long way foot to take me home. Several times I wanted to return home alone, but the family would not allow me to do so."

"You don't know the way. It's dangerous, especially for a young girl like you," they said. "You could be caught by the Germans, or someone else might seize you!'

"Oh, my God, now that I think about it, I know they were right. My aunt and uncle treated me as their own daughter. I love them all. I don't know whether I'll ever be able to reciprocate...And then the Gentile family- they too, treated me as their own child. They risked their lives for me. They watched over me to make sure I was safe. Several times, when the hooligans and the Germans roamed the streets and broke into Jewish homes, they hid me in their cellar. Just imagine: there is no law to protect innocent people. Oh, dear God, what is going to happen to us?"

It was depressing to listen to her talk that way.

"Don't worry," I said. "We are going home through the forest. We'll meet the Partisans. They will protect us. Father will you be able to find them? I promised that we would all return. I told them we would bring our entire family, even **Bobie**."

"What else did you tell them?" asked Sarah.

"I said that you were a writer and that you worked for a newspaper called ISKRA. I told them you were very beautiful."

"Let's stop right here," Father broke in." "I don't want to meet them. We must get home as soon as possible." He became very serious.

"We are talking too loudly," he cautioned. "We'll rest here. Yankel and Sara, you may take turns sleeping, but two of us must stand off at a distance and remain fully awake." He explained the matter to Sara. All three of us took turns resting.

"It would be fun to meet a real Partisan, I said. "I wonder what he would look like?"

"They look like us and don't try to find them. We still have a long way to travel. Stop fooling around you two. Don't talk so much and don't giggle", Father ordered as he searched for the sun through the tops of the tall trees. "We are about twelve kilometers from Iwieniec and only about half way home."

Father became more and more uneasy as he spoke." "This forest must be the command post of the Partisan movement. It is not too far from here to Minsk and to

the highway that leads to Moscow. The Germans are well entrenched. All that noise we hear comes from their trucks going back and forth."

A while later Father motioned to us to sit down close together. All three of us sensed that danger was close.

"We have a decision to make and I'd like to have your opinion in the matter," said Father. "Should we stay close together, or should we separate?"

"What do you mean by `separate'?" Sarah asked.

"Sh...sh...not so loud. Be very quiet, please... we must stay close enough not to lose sight of each other and far enough apart to run on our own if the Germans spot us. We'll run deeper into the forest if that happens. What do you think? Speak, both of you."

"We'll do whatever you say, Father."

"One thing we don't want is to be caught. We'll rest right here, and eat."

We had picked some berries along the way and we ate them along with the food we were given by our relatives. Now we were glad we had that food.

"I'll lead the way," Father said when we rose to continue on our journey. "We'll walk as fast as we can and we'll try to move in a triangle." He made a quick drawing. "Any questions? Remember: not a word. Now, let's go!"

It was very sticky and hot. Sarah tired more quickly than Father and I, and to accommodate her, we needed to rest often. Father and I smiled supportively. We tried to keep to a triangular pattern whether we were walked or rested. Now and then, while Father had his back to us as he led the way, Sarah and I would mimic clowns with our bodies. Father had difficulty turning his head to glance at us, and he tripped often.

"We are okay!" we signaled. Father raised his hand towards Heaven in a gesture of gratitude. The next time he motioned for us to stop, we drew close again.

"We are at the edge of the forest," he said." Close by are the barracks the Polish soldiers once occupied. Then the Russians commanded them; now the Germans are administering them. We'll turn off here and stay closer to the forest. It will take us farther from Iwieniec and will be a longer route, but a safer one. Do you see all those farmhouses out there? I know most of the people who live in them."

He was relaxed, and we became less tense as we watched him. We began to feel safer when he said: "We are out of danger now. I used to come here often. My father..your **Zeyde..**would take me to those farmers. He was a cobbler and made new boots for their families, and mended their old ones. Every Thursday he would walk this stretch of land to bring home chickens, eggs and butter. He never paid for

anything. The farmers would tell him that the food was their gift to him for his skillful, honest labor."

"I know this area well," my father continued. "It is about twelve kilometers from home. Let's walk to that house over there. It is about two kilometers from here. The farmer's name is Mr. Stanislaw. We must get there before dark."

Sarah was really fatigued. Because she could hardly walk, we had to rest often and we walked slowly. Father was concerned that she might become ill. I did not know what to do to help. When I tried to lift her, she smiled. Finally, Father and I each supported one of her arms, and that is how we reached our destination. As we approached the farmhouse Father said:

"Wait out here, both of you, while I go inside." We could hear dogs barking, and soon Mr. Stanislaw came out of the house. Seeing Father he said: "Oh, it is David, the son of Gershon the Shoemaker." He rarely called my father by his name; he was always called `Gershinu syn' (the son of Gershon).

"Who are these children?" Mr. Stanislaw wanted to know.

"They are Gershiny wnuk (Gershon's grandchildren)."

"Come in, come in, quickly." He locked the door behind us. "Fortunately, my son is not here. He left for Rubiezewiecze to apply for some sort of job. I am hoping he does not get it. He was talking about becoming a policeman. That is what most of his school friends have become."

We were uneasy when we heard that, but were too tired to ask questions.

The farmer's wife said: "My son will be coming back, and I don't want him to know that you are here. I don't like what he tells us about his friends and their activities. I think we'll all be better off if you sleep in the barn."

It was an excellent idea. I loved the smell of the hay. Father made sure we each bedded down in a separate spot, and we all fell asleep at once.

The sun was up when Father woke us. Noiselessly, we headed for the door of the barn. Mr. Satnislaw was already doing his chores on the farm. He was surprised to see us.

"I thought you had left! I went in to wake you and when I didn't find you, I was sure you had gone! I am certainly glad all is well. Here is some food."

He kept the dog from barking while we thanked him and his wife for their hospitality. They both seemed relieved to see us leave.

We continued on our way until we saw Mother holding the two little ones by the hand. All three of them started towards us at once. We, too, tried to run to them, but our aching legs wouldn't let us move very fast.

For a while Mother couldn't utter a word. She was shocked into silence. But soon the hugging began. And so did the crying.

"You can stop crying," I said. "You've cried enough. No need to continue."

She was overjoyed as she wiped away her tears. Then she sighed: "Now, if only we could bring Yentel home, I wouldn't ask for anything more!"

CHAPTER 2 - SARA IS HOME

It was a pleasure to see Mother smiling again. Her face was radiant and her weariness seemed to have disappeared. We all held hands as we entered the house; we were together and grateful for it.

Bobie had prepared all sorts of goodies for this special occasion. When **Bobie** laughed, we all had to laugh. She had no teeth, and when her gums showed, she looked like a little baby with a wrinkled face. When we got inside, we found the table set. In our delight, we danced around it.

"It's wonderful!" Mother said: "Sarah is here, as are Father and Yankel. Look, all of us are present! I can hardly believe it! You see, God heard my prayers and my weeping. And now I'm sure Yentel will show up some day, too. If only I knew where she is, we'd bring her home too. But this time I'd go along. The anxiety I felt while waiting for you to was unbearable.

I had never seen Mother so happy. She buoyed us with new strength and hope. Tired as we were, we danced around the table once more. Looking back don't know how we were able to do it.

"How did you know when to look for us?" Father asked. "You arrived just in time."

"The day you left here," **Bobie** said, "she did not rest. She walked all the way out past the villages until she was exhausted. Then she hurried home. She could not sleep or eat. She was constantly running back and forth, never realizing the danger she was in. I begged her not to do it, but she did not listen to me."

My little sister, Merre-Liebe, who was about seven at the time, asked: "Why can't we have parties like this more often? **Bobie** will prepare all the goodies; we'll sing and dance, and I'll invite my friends. We'll play games, too. It's so long since we had a party! It would make Mamma happy and she would stop crying."

I could hardly wait to tell everyone about our adventure with the Partisans. But every time I would start, Father would say: "Not yet; wait, not yet."

Mother said : "As soon as we bring Yentel home, we'll have another gala event. Yankel will regale us with stories about the Partisans, you will bring all your friends, and **Bobie** will make lots of good things to eat, as she always does. But now we all need a good rest. Sarah can hardly stand. The three of you had better take baths now, while the water is hot. It will cool soon and then it will be difficult to re-heat. Wood is getting scarce. And it is not easy to get water either. The Christian children throw stones at us when we go to the well. So, stop wasting time; go get washed."

It felt good to get rid of the dust. When I lay down to sleep, the two little ones kept me awake crawling all over me. But that didn't matter. I fell asleep despite them and their noise.

Sarah was still snoring gently when Mother and **Bobie** were preparing to go to the Shimkowitz forest nearby to bring home kindling wood. When Father realized their intention he jumped up:

"Don't you dare enter that forest!" he cried. "The retreating Russian army fought the Germans there and that entire area is full of live ammunition. Grenades, dead horses and lifeless bodies are still strewn about. You know what happened to Eli Shimanowich, the grocer, don't you? When he went there to collect kindling wood, he was blown to pieces."

"But we must get some wood," Mother insisted, "so we can cook food to eat."

At that point **Bobie** interjected: "Just the other day, while you were out looking to see whether the family had arrived , I went to the cemetery to pray at **Zeyde's** grave. I saw some of the townspeople there chopping down trees. Why not go there to get some wood?"

"A good idea," said Father. "Let's go right now."

When **Bobie**, Mother and Father were preparing to leave, Sarah and I were still half asleep. As soon as the door closed behind them, the two little ones came running to tell us what had happened. We jumped out of our beds and dressed quickly. Then all four of us ran in the direction the cemetery. Sarah was the leader, half walking, half running. Yitzchok had a hard time keeping up with us, but even though we had to wait for him once in a while before hurrying on again, we caught up with our elders.

Forgetting the purpose of our mission, we children felt as though we were on a family picnic and jumped about quite a bit. It was fun. When we finally reached the cemetery, we gathered up some twigs and branches and turned homeward. Since the cemetery was not really that far from where we lived, we soon arrived safely home.

Bobie smiled, displaying her gums, as mother started chopping the branches and breaking the twigs. The rest of us were soon busy helping out with that too.

CHAPTER 3 AT GETZEL ' S MILL:

Mother and **Bobie** were happy. There was wood in the house and they could bake bread the following day. When Mother and **Bobie** baked together, it was not only fun to watch, it was also wonderful to smell the baking and let it tease our taste.

Sarah asked about the recipe. "When I get married, I'll need to know how to bake bread," she insisted.

That set off a friendly competition between Mother and **Bobie**: who was the expert and better qualified to teach Sarah how to bake bread. **Bobie** became angry.

"Before you married my son you knew nothing," she reminded Mother. The teasing made us laugh. It was fun to watch them argue. When **Bobie** was angry, she would shut her lips and talk through her nose. And that sounded like a hundred cats purring. Sarah smiled. My little brother and sister and I laughed till our sides ached. I don't know how much Sarah learned about baking bread that day, but we realized that we could have some fun despite the grim situation.

"Tomorrow morning we'll have to go to Getzel the Miller and make some flour," Father broke in. "We have two **poods** of grain. The farmer had no flour to pay me for my work, so I accepted the grain rather than return empty-handed." He sounded apologetic.

"Now, how shall we go about getting it done?" he continued.

We were all quiet for a while. We realized the danger involved in getting to the mill and doing what had to be done. **Bobie** opened her mouth as if to say something, but this time she neither spoke nor laughed. She just looked angry. But she always did, even when she was really laughing.

As I watched her, I started to chuckle loudly. I could not contain myself. Father became so upset with my behavior, that he was ready to slap me. Fortunately, **Bobie** came to my defense:

"Oh, let him alone, He always laughs at me."

"But this is not a laughing matter!" Father was worried.

I went over to him. "There's nothing to it," I said, trying to reassure him. "I know the mill well. When I was in **Betar**, we would go there to play and train. And you know how often I went down to that area on Friday mornings to try to catch fish for the Sabbath. Besides, I'd like to see Khane again," I remarked.

"Who's Khane?" Father asked.

"Oh, you know! She's Getzel's daughter."

Getzel's daughter Khane used to chase me if I went into the mill. Once her father came by while we were arguing. He wanted to know what the trouble was. "I just asked her to let me see how flour is made", I said.

"Aha," said Getzel the Miller. "Come, you two." He took us each by the hand. "I'll show you around and you'll see how we make flour."

But Khane protested: "He'll bother me".

"If he does, I'll throw him into the water," said Getzel.

Getzel was a nice man. His face was always streaked with flour, and so was Khane's. Getzel also had two sons. One was studying electrical engineering in Wilno; the other was helping his father at the mill.

Actually, I was more interested in seeing Khane than I was in converting two **pood** of grain into flour. Khane was a beautiful girl, about my age. We had attended the same school and we often teased each other.

Although the mill had been confiscated by the German authorities, the town council permitted Getzel to continue to operate it. Several Volksdeutsche (local Germans) were assigned to making sure that Getzel, (a prominent member of the Jewish community), scrupulously obeyed the German prescriptions.

"I haven't been to the mill for a long time", I said. "Because I don't want to lose the two **pood** of grain, I'd better go there by myself first and snoop around a little."

"I'll go with you," Sarah said.

I objected.

"Then I'll go without you," she snapped.

Mother and Father decided I should go by myself. They thought that would be safer. With my blond hair, I looked like a non-Jew and I would be less apt to arouse suspicion.

I was out of the house in no time heading toward Getzel's mill. It was nice to stroll along the water's edge. We called the water `Getzel's river'. Only a short time before, it had been a playground for all the kids in the area. Everyone went there to fish and swim, and many a new game was thought up there. It was fun to go to Getzel's river in the winter; ice skating there was great. It was also an exciting place to visit during the Passover season, when the ice began to melt. The larger chunks had to be broken up; they were a threat to the bridge leading to the mill. If the bridge were to be seriously damaged by an ice flow, the farmers and townspeople would be unable to get to the mill to grind their grain. So every spring, every one in the vicinity came to help break up the ice jam. The children would stand around and watch,

innocently hoping someone would fall into the icy water. That never happened, though, because the men were quite expert at the job.

As I ambled along thinking of all those things, I almost forgot the purpose of my trip to the mill. When I finally arrived, it was crowded with peasants hustling and bustling about. All of them came for the same reason: to grind their grain into meal. I sneaked in, threw some flour over me so I would look as dusted as the other kids running about, and watched them helping their fathers stuff the meal into large sacks. Whenever I noticed a peasant struggling to fill his sack, I helped him cram the flour in, saying as I did so, that I expected to be paid for my work. The farmers agreed and paid me in flour.

The Volksdeutsche, wearing armband swastikas, were everywhere. Getzel was running around, too. Although I was close to him on several occasions, he did not recognize me. I finally had to approach him directly, because I needed a sack for the flour I had earned.

"Mr. Getzel, I'm Yankel, David's son. One of Gershon's grandchildren. I need a bag."

Oh, my God!" Getzel exclaimed. He started to remove the dust from my face to look at me, but he thought better of it and patted the flour back on.

"How is Khane?"

"Never mind about Khane now. How did you get in here? You look like one of the peasants."

"**Reb** Getzel, she looks a little like you, and can mingle with the children who come here. Oh, there she is!"

"Who is he, Papa,?" she asked as she approached us.

"Sh...sh...be quiet. This is Yankel."

"I can't believe it!" She began to brush the flour from my face, grabbing hold of it, and gazing at me.

"Take it easy! You are ripping my face!"

"Oh, don't worry! I'm not going to kill you! How did you get in here?"

"It was easy. I just followed some peasants."

Something stuck in my throat and I did not know what else to say. I touched her grain-smeared face and pigtails. Her blue eyes met mine.

"I need a sack for the flour I earned from that peasant over there."

She ran and brought me one quickly. Then the two of us ran to the peasant as Getzel watched. I started once again to help the peasant fill his sack.

“Where did you go?" the man asked? I told him.

“Let's finish this so I can pay you," he said. "How do you want to be paid?"

“I'll take flour."

“Good. How much?"

“As much as I can carry."

“Well, let's see how much that is. How much can you lift?"

Getzel was standing close by and smiling as I struggled. He could see that I would be unable to lift the sack

“Let's see you pick it up," said the peasant. Khane tried to help me.

“Take some off," said the man.

“Now let's try it", said Khane. Trying, we fell and began to tease each other. The peasant reminded us of the business at hand.

“We made a deal and we must honor it: as much as you can carry."

The Volksdeutsche with the swastika on his armband paid no attention to us. He evidently thought we were the peasant's children. We sat for a while, wondering what to do next.

“Remove some more," ordered the man. “It's as much as you can carry, remember?

At last there was an amount left that I could handle.

I turned to Khane. “I must go home to tell my family what has happened here. I told them I would be back soon. Please watch my hard-earned flour for me." She just smiled I ran out of Getzel's mill and hurried home. I knew quite well that everyone was wondering what had happened to me. They were probably preparing to search for me.

I was right. Sarah was already standing at our door.

“Here he is, the brat!" she screamed at the top of her voice.

"You drove us all crazy!" The little ones began to beat me and cry. Everyone participated in removing the flour from me. I protested that they were not cleaning me. It felt more as if they were breaking my bones, - punishing me.

"Enough! Enough! Let me catch my breath!" I begged.

A little later I told them what had happened to delay me. Sarah volunteered to return with me and the little ones chimed in. Then she asked mother for a sack so that we could divide the flour into two separate loads.

"A good idea," I said. Then it struck me that I had not seen any girls at the mill.

"You had better put on a pair of trousers and do something with your hair," I advised. "You have to look like a boy."

We had never seen Sarah dressed like that and our laughter was spontaneous and loud. She tried to transfer some of the dust still left on me to her face. It was perfect make-up, or so I thought. At last we were on our way.

"Who is watching the flour?" Sarah asked.

"Khane."

"Who is Khane?"

"Getzel's daughter."

"Oh, I know her. She is a very beautiful child."

"I think she's very ugly."

When we reached the banks of Getzel's river, Sarah stopped.

"Why are you stopping? We must get to the mill!"

"But it is beautiful here! Just look at the setting sun!"

"What's so great about it?"

"Look how it is reflected in the water! Don't you see the extravaganza of colors?"

"I don't see any colors. Stop dreaming, Sara, and let's go."

"Don't you feel the warmth of the sun? It is so far away and yet it feels so near."

"Please stop! The sun is doing what it is supposed to do, nothing more," I remarked.

"See how calmly the water flows. If you listen, you can hear it. Do you hear the birds singing? It sounds like a symphony."

"I like the water because I can go swimming and play in it and especially because on Fridays I can go fishing to provide food for the Sabbath. But you are talking about crazy things. You make a big to-do about everything!"

She dipped her feet in the water and splashed it around. Then she insisted I do the same.

"We'll lose the flour I earned. Let's get it! They'll close!"

"Oh, my goodness! I forgot all about that! And if they catch us, we'll be in trouble. They just beat some Jews for using the mill. It's horrible. Why are they doing it?"

"I removed my yellow star and they didn't beat me."

"Silly, you got away with it cause the police didn't catch you!"

"I don't understand it" I said. "Can you explain what's going on?"

Her eyes welled up with tears. "The Germans want to kill all the Jews," she began. "Because we are Jews, they are going to kill us. That's what's going on."

"You see things in the sun that I don't. You hear music in the singing of the birds that don't. And now you are telling me insane things about killing Jews. You'd better see a doctor. Something terrible must be happening to you. It would have been better if you had remained in Wolozin... But now it's getting late and we have to go."

Before long we were at the mill, where Khane and Getzel were waiting for us. I apologized to Getzel for running off without an explanation.

"That's all right. Khane told me where you went," he replied.

The peasants were ready to take their flour home on their carts and Sarah and I were ready to divide our share into two bags.

"This is my sister Sarah. Not too long ago I went with Father to bring her home from Wolozin."

"But she looks like a boy!" Khane exclaimed.

"Sh...sh..." cautioned Getzel.

"It must be nice to have a sister," Khane said. "I have two brothers and they don't pay much attention to me. Your sister is beautiful, even in that funny outfit."

"What is your name? Mine is Khane."

The two of them became friends immediately.

"You are a very beautiful young lady," Sarah said. "Even with the dust on your face, I can see your fine features."

"There goes the Volksdeutsche," said Getzel... You'd better go downstairs and get ready while I talk business with him."

A few minutes later Getzel the Miller appeared, running downstairs. "Get out of here as fast as you can," he said excitedly.

We transferred some flour to the second bag, hugged Khane, and cautiously found our way out of the mill and back on our path towards home.

"I'm glad nothing bad happened," said Sarah. "I hope Getzel didn't get into trouble. He looked worried."

"You are always imagining things," I said. "Let's rest in this brush. No one can see us here."

As we sat there, Sarah asked me how I got the flour. "I hope you didn't steal it," she said. Since I had been thinking of telling her about my escapade, I did so.

"I'm proud of you," she said when she learned I had earned the flour. After a while she asked:

"Do you hear the crickets and the frogs? Did you notice the grasshoppers jumping around? It's so peaceful here!"

"I don't like the grunting for the frogs or the sound of the crickets. You are not listening to what I am saying."

"Look at those butterflies!" she called out. "Let's catch one." She soon did, and kept admiring its delicate beauty. Then she said:

"Isn't Khane a beautiful girl? I noticed the way she looks at you. She likes you."

"She gives me a head-ache."

"What happened?"

"When she was helping me with the flour, our eyes met and I wanted to say something to her, but I choked up and I couldn't say a word. It was an odd feeling. Then I touched her pigtails and my heart began to pound. I will not tell you what else

happened. Can you explain why I should react this way? We didn't have a fight, and I don't like girls... Why do you keep smiling at me and saying nothing? You think it is very amusing? I should not have told you."

"No, no. I do believe you are serious. You are growing up, becoming a young man. Soon you'll celebrate your Bar-Mitzvah. Then you'll be an adult. I can hardly wait to hear you read from the Torah. You'll chant the **Haftorah** before the entire congregation. All of us, Mother, Father, Merre-Liebe and Yitzkhok, myself and **Bobie**, too, Maybe Yentel will also be there. All of us will sit in the Synagogue and participate. We'll be so proud of you!"

"The folks at home will worry about us. Let's rush before it gets dark," I broke in."

"Before we left, I promised we would be home right after dark," Sarah said. "It's safer then. The hoodlums, don't usually roam the streets when it's dark. So, let's wait a little longer; let's not rush. Let me inhale the fresh air. I love the fragrant flowers. I feel like laughing and crying at the same time... Look! Look, to your left. The sun seems to be resting over the roof of the Synagogue as though to protect it and keep it from harm."

I remember how you used to sing there in the choir on our holidays. How quiet it would get when the young voices sang together. The High Holy Days solos were always so stirring.

CHAPTER 4 - SCHOOL DAYS:

For me, September 1941 was a very sad month. When school opened, it was announced that Jewish children were forbidden to attend. I had been looking forward to my new classes and I was very disappointed. When I turned to neighbors and anyone else I could find and I asked for an explanation, the replies I received were most distressing. They made me realize- for the first time- the danger we were in.

Some of the Jewish children decided to attend school on opening day to see what would happen. When they arrived at the entrance they found a big sign:

"JEWS AND DOGS NOT ALLOWED"

At about the same time, a **Judenrat** (Jewish Council) was established in our town and we were ordered to change from wearing an armband with a yellow star, to wearing a star on our chest and one on our back. That way, if the "authorities" wanted to shoot you, they could find an easy target on your chest or your back. Killings and beatings became an everyday occurrence. Fairly often, a group of people would suddenly be rushed off to various kinds of work. Such roundups were always accompanied by insults and beatings.

Sarah became more involved in making entries in her diary and I grew more frustrated about it. I did not know what she was writing about and asking was futile. She would simply chase me out of the room.

I was too young to be pressed into work groups, but when a call came for volunteers to chop firewood at the school, I was glad to report. Accompanied by a policeman, the "volunteers" entered the school. The caretaker explained what needed to be done and supplied us with saws and hatchets. We went right to work. It felt good to be in school, even though it was only to chop wood.

Hearing the bell ring later, however, made me very sad. This was learning time, but there I was, being compelled to chop wood. I decided to sneak out and join the children in the playground. They did not pay much attention to me. That made me wonder what would happen if I followed the children to the classroom. I decided to try it.

The teacher, Stozipiczowa, recognized me but did not stop me. Instead, she motioned me to a seat, placed paper, pencils and a few books on my desk, and turned away. Later, in the session, when I, along with everyone else, was busy writing, the teacher casually walked past my seat and left a note on the desk. In Russian and in Polish it read: "Do the same thing you did before."

The bell rang and the class ran out of the room. I hurried down to where my group was working and told my foreman what I had done.

"Good! Very good!" he replied. "Don't worry, we'll all cover for you. I rushed out to the playground and participated in all sorts of games. So far so good.

When the bell rang again, everyone hurried back to the class-room and I did as I had done earlier. The teacher's husband, Mr. Stozipicz, entered the room. He was the arithmetic teacher. I thought he was a wonderful person. Although he was an alcoholic, it never affected his teaching and I had never seen him tipsy or debilitated. He recognized me at once and smiled, nodding his head in approval. I fought back tears of joy. It was so wonderful to be in school again! When various children raised their hands to participate in the lesson, I did likewise. The teacher glanced at me and smiled. I realized at once that raising my hand created a dilemma for him. A little later, as he stopped by my desk while checking papers, he whispered: "Continue to do the same thing." I was elated.

The bell rang. I ran down to my group. The foreman was waiting for me a the cellar door. Instructing the other men to pay no attention to what was happening, he waved me out to the playground.

I had some fun until the bell summoned us all back to the classroom. While in my seat, I put my books in order and as I placed them in my drawer, I saw a carefully wrapped sandwich. I could easily have eaten it right then and I wanted to, for I was certainly hungry. But I put it back at once.

The third session was my favorite- Pszyroda (Nature Study). Mr. Schultz walked in. Attending a class with Mr. Schultz was always interesting and delightful. He, too, nodded his head approvingly when he looked in my direction.

I knew those teachers well and they certainly knew me. Only a few months earlier I did not have to sneak into a class. I was a good student and earned high marks. I loved my teachers and they showed affection for me in return. I was not comfortable now surreptitiously moving in and out. Still, it was fun, though I knew that sooner or later I would have to stop, and there might be unpleasant repercussions for everyone concerned.

Indeed, the following day my foreman discouraged me from attending class. He said that while I did this the previous day, some teachers came down, looked around, and then left without saying anything. The foreman was worried.

I went home and told the story to my parents. "This child has no fear," my mother commented. "But you've given me an idea. We have enough teachers of our own to start a school. Once we have a school of our own, you won't have to do what you did to get an education."

"That's an excellent idea," Sarah said. "I'll work on it."

As the days passed, I reminded her about it often. Her reply was always the same: "We're working on it. It takes time to organize. This is no small project." Several meetings were held at our house.

One day while I was chopping wood in the school cellar, teacher Stozipiczowa came down. When she saw me she sat down on a log and called me to join her.

"How are you, Yakov?" she asked, seating me on her lap. "All the teachers miss you. We would all like to help you, but we don't know how. It would be very dangerous for all of us. Anyway, I've brought you some books. Take them home and see what you can do with them." I was choked with tears and so was she as she ran out, visibly shaken.

The teacher's response to the outlawing of her pupils made a strong impression on me. I was sad and angry at the same time. I told this to my foreman, and I also mentioned that my mother had conceived the idea of opening a school of our own and that my sister was already involved in making preparations for its implementation.

"I must go talk with them," the foreman said. "I can help. We'll all help."

Several planning sessions were held at our house. Long talks and discussions took place. It was all very boring to me. I never really wanted to sit in, but I felt I had to. As for the adults, they did not seem to mind my presence.

CHAPTER 5- SARAH'S ROOM:

Occasionally, I would sneak into my sister's room to find out what was happening there. She would always chase me out. I would insist that all I wanted was to know to whom she was writing every day.

"That is none of your business" she would scream. “Get out of here.”

One day as she tried to push me out of the room, I resisted. She complained to Mother.

"Why does he bother me all the time?"

"Oh, let him alone," Mother urged. "He just wants to spend some time with his older sister.

"But he's interrupting my diary entrees and private correspondence. He keeps asking to whom and what I'm writing, and that's none of his business. And when he's in here, Yitskhok and Merre-Liebe come in, too. I can't handle all of them at one time. Please, Mama tell them not to bother me in my room."

"Oh, don't make a fuss over it. He'll leave by himself. Stop fighting, you two.” When my sister attempted to push me again, I stretched out on the floor and braced my feet against the door to her room.

"Do you know what she wants to do, Mama? She wants to go back to Wolozin! I glanced at a sentence or two. She is writing to her boyfriend in Wolozin. She said she loves him, or something like that...Can you imagine it? Father and I had to go so far to bring her home, and now she wants to go back to him in Wolozin. She is crazy! Do you think it was easy to get through the German lines, with bullets whistling around us? You experienced it only once, on the way home. But Father and I risked it twice. Do you think it was pleasant to be interrogated by the Partisans? They thought Father was a spy. They were ready to kill him! Do you think it was fun to be led blindfolded into a cave and stand shivering from fear and cold?

"Do you know what went on in this house because we wanted you here with all of us? Mother and Father went to our Christian neighbors, to the villagers, in search of someone who would go for you? They were willing to give everything we have to anyone who would do it. "And now you want to go back to a boyfriend in Wolozin? Oh, no you don't! Let me tell you something, sister! If that is what you have in mind I'll run away and join the Partisans in the woods. I'm not fooling! I'll become a Partisan like the man from Koydanov. If you go back to Wolozin, who'll go to the village to tell father what is happening at home? Who will help him carry his the food he earns for his work? You know that we two are the only ones who can. Yitsinke is only five, and Merre-Liebe is nine.

"How can you talk about going back to Wolozin? You can’t. Mother is always ill. Father is always away in the village. You see how weak he is when he finally does

get home. The first thing he asks every time is: how is everybody? He worries about us. Haven't you noticed how he smiles when you wipe the sweat from his face when he comes in? Even Yitzkhok stops crying and jumps on Father for joy, and we all try to help him take off his wet clothes. Those seem to be the happiest hours of his life. And you want to go back to Wolozin. Oh, no!"

Sarah put her arm around me. She didn't say a word.

"You see mother crying all the time about your older sister, Yentel. You know mother is sick about her. And what are you thinking about? Boys! You let your best friend Masha come to see you almost every day, and Rivka, and some fellow you say is from Stayfts. But as soon as I want to come in you chase me out. Why do you do that? I hate you for it! And if you return to Wolozin I'll run away from home. Yes, I will. I'll run away!"

When he heard that, my little brother, Yitzkhok, rushed over to me. He was in tears.

"Don't go, Jakal!" he cried, his voice breaking. (He could not pronounce "Yankel"). He began kicking me with his little feet. Merre-Liebe soon joined him.

"Mama, I can't take it any more!" I said. "Sarah keeps pushing me. Yitzkhok kicks me. And you don't stop crying."

"Stop it now, all of you!" mother commanded. Yankel is not going to the woods, and Sara is not going back to Wolozin. Who started this commotion, anyway? Who gave you these ideas?"

"That's why I don't want him snooping around here, and reading my diary" said Sarah. "He doesn't understand what he reads, and he interprets it in his own childish way and starts carrying on about my wanting to go to Wolozin, to my boy friend. Well, I have no boy friend and I am not returning to Wolozin. And now, will you all please leave my room and let me alone," she said, tears streaming down her face.

Gently, mother began pushing us out of the room. Her face was contorted in sorrow and anger and her voice cracked as she repeated over and over:

"Oh, my children! My poor children! They are so fearful. Oh, God in Heaven, what will become of us?"

We three young ones sat down outside the door to Sarah's room, my little brother to my left, and my baby sister on my right. We put our hands on each other's shoulders and sat quietly for a while, listening to Mother's grievances.

Then, slowly, we began to sway from left to right and back again while we composed a little song:

"Sarah is not going to Wolozin! Sarah is not going to Wolozin!"

She came out of her room when she heard us. We surrounded her and danced around her.

CHAPTER 6- ZELDA COMES TO VISIT OUR FAMILY:

One day in September our family had a great surprise. My father's sister Zelda arrived from Minsk (some 60 kilometers away) to visit us. The families had not seen each other since a border was established between Poland and Russia some 25 years earlier. The Gershon family, stranded on the Russian side, settled in Minsk, while my father and his family remained in Rubzewitz. There had been no contact at all. So when the kissing and the tears subsided, we all sat down to a good meal prepared for us by Mother and Bobie. It was a treat for Zelda as well as for us.

Zelda was a beautiful woman, younger than my father, probably in her early or middle thirties. She was single; she had blonde hair and a charming personality. She looked typically Russian, not Jewish-looking at all.. Zelda was well acquainted with the highways and roads, so she hitchhiked from Minsk to Rubzewitz Before the war she had worked in a dental laboratory. "Tell us what's happening in Minsk," Mother said.

From our aunt we found out that hundreds of German Jews had been taken to Minsk. The Russian Jews were unable to speak German and the German Jews were unable to understand Russian. But that made no difference. The two groups had no chance to mix since the German Jews were taken away to the old Russian Military Barracks.

"It was sheer horror for us all," Zelda said. "You may have heard about it. Some of the young men and women escaped to the woods. We became aware of what to expect from the Germans. The Partisan movement did not want us, unless we could bring weapons and ammunition with us. So we said fine, we'll do our best. Let me stop now for a while."

She continued: "By "we" I mean an underground movement in cooperation with some members of the Judenrat. It is a little complicated. Not only do we have enemies among the non-Jews, we've had to suspect Jews, too, believe it or not. The Germans became suspicious, and executed two members of the **Judenrat**." When she mentioned their names, Mother paled. She had known one of the executed men. He had been a **Bund** leader and the organizer of **Yene Yatn**.

Zelda was not just hitchhiking from Minsk to Rubzewitz; she was sent by the leaders from the underground to procure arms. She put her hand in her bosom and took out some gold coins.

"The only way we can get arms is by paying for them in gold. I volunteered for this mission, because this might be the only chance I'll get to see you. I don't know if I'll ever see you again."

"As for the Partisan movement", she continued, "they were not anxious to accept us. We had an unfortunate experience with them. They seized arms from our

boys, and even shot some of them. As a whole, the civilian population was very hostile to us Jews.

"Why wouldn't they accept us?", Sara asked,

"I'll explain" Zelda said. "A delegation of prominent Jews in Minsk, some of high military rank, arranged a meeting with the high command of the Partisan movement in the Minsk region. It was a painstaking task, but it had to be done, and we did it. I'll just tell you what was said, and this will answer your question, I hope. Suppose a family of five Jews hides in the woods. At night the father knocks at a door, brandishing a gun and demanding food for his family. The peasant understandably resents the intruders. The Germans call these Jews bandits and robbers, and the peasants agree. So the Germans encounter no peasant resistance to their anti-Semitic activities.

The Commander of the Minsk Region said, `when we need help from the population, we give orders from a command post, and we carefully plan things so as not to offend the civilian population in any way. We give civilians a receipt for the value of whatever they contribute, and we promise them that after the war, they will be repaid by the government of the USSR- with interest. Among your people, however, there is no discipline.' To be brief, if what he says is true or not, the fact remains: the Partisan movement is not happy with us. They might be empathetic, but that is all.

The truth is, the Germans mean to kill us all. The local population couldn't care less; they even help the Germans. The Partisans don't want us, although they'll tolerate a group of families around their compounds some kilometers away to serve as a warning for when the Germans attack."

"How can we save ourselves?" Mother asked. "It seems there is no hope."

"The plan you suggested of hiding your family among the peasants is a good one, especially if you know the peasants well. As for having shattered hopes, Shoshka, I wouldn't lose hope so soon. I would delay that judgment until the storm is over. You'll have to hide when danger is imminent, then reappear when things settle down. That is why we have to build hiding places in the ghetto and in the woods- as animals do. It's our only hope! Since Yakov knows the survival secrets of animals in the woods, he'll be of help- invaluable help." She smiled, when she said this.

"As for you Sarah, what you are writing in your diary is of great importance. If you could offer your services to the Partisans this would help a great deal.

I'll report my experiences with you to my committee in Minsk. Your high spirits give me the courage to carry on."

Father said, "As I see it, you have it hard in Minsk. Why don't all of you come to us and we'll find room for you in our house. At least we'll be together again in the home of Gershon after so many years of separation."

I'll discuss it with my sisters", Zelda said.

It was quiet for a while. She covered her face with her hands to hide her tears and emotions. And then she said, "We don't know where it would be safer. There is no haven for us. We are hunted like animals." She quickly wiped away her tears.

"I must meet my friends in the vicinity of Koydanov at a given time." She looked at her watch and said, "I need a few hours of rest. I have to rise very early."

Father suggested we all accompany her. "That would be nice" she said, and we agreed.

Bobie got busy preparing food for Zelda. Mother readied dresses and other needed items even though Zelda protested it would be hard for her to carry it all.

Father heated water for Zelda's bath. "I really appreciate that" she said. With that, we all went to bed.

No one slept- except Zelda-, and nobody moved- so as not to wake her. It was pitch dark when the clock broke the stillness of the night, and Zelda got out of bed. By then everything was ready for her.

While she was getting ready to leave, I asked her if she would take me along. I had never been to a large city. I had heard that Minsk was a beautiful metropolis. I was told that there were tall buildings, many automobiles and electricity. Just flick a switch and there is light; turn a knob and water spouts from a wall. They said there are toilets inside houses and there many schools to choose from.

"Father took me along to Wolozin and I did not give him any trouble. I'm right Father, am I not?"

Then I turned to Sarah: "I came with father to pick you up, didn't I?"

"Take me with you Zelda."

"Don't bother her," **Bobie** interrupted. "You with your crazy ideas. You think Minsk is next door? It's just as far away as Wolozin, maybe further. You could hardly walk when you fell into the house, returning from Wolozin."

"But I'm all right now **Bobie**", I protested.

"Listen Yakov, one day I'll not only take you with me, I'll take your entire family as well. When that time comes, I'll arrive with a car, and show you the beautiful City of Minsk, explain how electricity works, how water comes from a faucet and especially, I'll show you the many schools.

But now all of these nice things are forbidden to Jews. There are no schools for Jewish children. But this will not last forever. The day will come when schools will be open to us too. Just be patient.

I'm sorry Shoshka - I can't take all those things you prepared for me. If I am forced to run, I'll have to drop them.

Let's go. It's getting late" Zelda said. "To tell the truth, it's not necessary for all of you to accompany me. Your father alone would have been fine.

Now comes the hardest moment for me - to say good-bye to you all, to my brother and his wife, to Sara and to Jacob. We've all cried a lot already; let's not cry any more."

But she was the one who started to cry again. At the edge of the forest she proceeded towards her destination alone. With prayers and tears we parted. An emptiness overtook us as we all sat down and prayed for Zelda's safe return.

The occupying power did not give us any rest. There was much talk of creating a ghetto. I did not know what "ghetto" meant. It was a new word to me.

The local Jewish "police" (who did not like what they were obliged to do) knocked at our door frequently and Sarah and I were sent to do all kinds of work. They often came for Father but he was away working in the nearby villages. When that happened, the police conscripted me instead. On one occasion, Sara was assigned to work in the marshes of Sula. She was ill and unable to go, so I went instead. A German base was located near where we were put to work. The German occupants decided to amuse themselves with the Jews. As we stood working knee-deep in the marsh, the Germans appeared and began to beat us mercilessly. I, too, took some of the bashes, although I tried desperately to avoid them. I was shaken and horrified.

The workers panicked. They screamed, they fell into the mud, and, despite their pain and their bleeding wounds, they began to run in all directions. The Germans tried to round us up with their whips but I managed to keep running and I finally reached the forest. Exhausted, I fell, the screams of the wounded still ringing in my ears. I was afraid to cry lest I attract attention, although I thought I was the only one there in the woods.

Apparently, I dozed off. When I opened my eyes, I could not believe what I saw: a pair of feet next to mine. For a while, I thought I was dreaming, so I touched the other feet gently. They felt real. I was afraid to turn my head. How could those feet get in here?, I wondered. Then I touched my own. I was still afraid to move my head but I no longer thought I was dreaming. I began to tremble with fear. As though paralyzed, I could not move. Then I felt a gentle tap on my shoulder and I heard a voice.

"Yakov?"

I was puzzled. He knows my name! How? I thought I must be losing my mind. Surely there was something wrong with me. I closed my eyes again.

The next moment I felt a body inching closer to me. My feet were touched lightly and I heard:

"It's Hershel."

And, sure enough, it was. Hershel from Koydanov, the Partisan my father and I met in the forest when we were going to Wolozin for Sarah.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

"I was sent here", I was told.

"By whom?"

"Must you always ask questions? Don't ask me, and don't tell anybody you saw me here!"

"I will. I'll tell my father and my sister. But I am sure they won't believe me, so, you needn't worry"

I told him what was happening in Sula, and how I came to be in the forest. He said he had heard the screams.

"I'm so happy to see you. Where is your rifle?" I asked.

"Here it is."

"Let me touch it."

"Don't. It's loaded."

"All right. But what do you mean by 'loaded'?"

"Look here." He took some bullets from his belt and told me that they could kill. He explained how dangerous a loaded rifle is. Then he asked:

"How are your father, Sarah and your family? And, oh, yes, your **Bobie**, too?"

I told him what was had happened in our town and he said he knew all about it. Then I asked:

"Why don't you come and visit us some time?"

"I know where you live," Hershel replied. "Once I was about to come in, but when I peeked through the window, I saw that there were a number of people in your house."

"Oh, that must have been one of those meetings," I explained. "Mother wants us to organize our own school."

"Good idea. Well, it's getting late. You'd better get home. The road will be clear now. The others have all left. You know the way, don't you? If you leave now you'll catch up with the other workers returning home. Be careful, Yakov. My regards home." He lifted me in the air, and gave me a warm hug. Then he put me down, saluted and said:

"Now go." I did, but I kept turning my head until he was out of sight. I could have caught up with the group, but I hesitated, and kept some distance behind them.

At home, a few hours later, Sarah pleaded:" Please tell me what happened in Sula. All who went, came back beaten and bloody. Some could scarcely walk. How is it that you are all right, and are hardly even scratched?"

I opened up my shirt and showed her my black and blue welts.

"I'm glad Mother didn't see those people, all of them so badly beaten. She would probably have died on the spot," said my sister.

"Then just don't tell her. She doesn't have to know everything. And I'm glad you were unable to go to work this morning. I can imagine Mother if she saw you coming home from Sula beaten and bloody. All of us need to learn to run really fast. You would have had a badly wounded brother if I had not been able to run well today."

Since she was in a good mood, it occurred to me to ask her what she was writing and why.

“A diary”, she replied. She explained it was very personal and no other person was allowed to read it, not even her little brother.

“I must write. If I do not express what I feel, I will explode... And please don't disturb me when I am making my entries. It hurts me to have to push you out of my room.”

“Here is an example of my writing. I am going to jot down everything I saw today. It is not terribly interesting, but I must tell someone. I have no 'someone' in whom I can confide. Our people are seeing and experiencing it all themselves and are not interested in listening to me. I feel like screaming now. Why the beatings? Why so much bloodshed? However, if I did scream, everyone would think I’m crazy. Can you understand that?

When I write, what I am really doing is silently screaming, silently bleeding. And I'm in pain. But you hear nothing and see nothing of all that. That is why it is so private. It is just words that pour out of me in my distress. When you bother me, you don't let me relieve my pain.

You showed me the black and blue marks from the lashes you received today. Of course you were in pain, but at least you could scream and, under the circumstances, you would be understood. I cannot scream the way you did." She opened her blouse. "Do you see any black and blue marks, any bruises on my back? There aren't any. Do you see any blood on me? You don't. No, of course you don't, but inside I am bleeding profusely. I'm black and blue inside, from the end of every strand of my hair to the tips of my toes. Some day you will understand that. Yes, I know, I am certain you will. I think you are a very bright boy and do clever things. During your encounter with the Partisans it was your reaction that saved Father's life when those people suspected him of being a spy. And how you got the flour! I would never have thought of doing what you did to get it! Or, take the way you gave Mother the idea of opening a school, even though you were unaware of what you were doing. And now, today, your successful escape from danger."

"You don't have to be bright for this sort of thing. It just happened. I did it without thinking," I said.

"Have you forgotten what happened a few years ago? I was so angry, I was ready to kill you. You made me cry and I began to hit you."

"You did? What happened a few years ago?"

"Father had a few extra coins he wanted us to share, but there was not really enough for both of us. So the question arose: who should get the money, you or I? We all agreed that I should. Even you said so. Now do you remember what happened? You got the money! And do you know why? Because you said that if Father gave it to me I would spend it, but that if you got it, you would double its value and then you would give it back to me. You did do it. Do you remember how you did ? You decided to make **kvas**. You made it at home, then sold it and doubled the money."

"Oh, my goodness! That was so long ago I'd entirely forgotten."

"It was not that long ago. Two or three years, perhaps. No more than that."

"I couldn't have done it without your cooperation. It was a lot of fun because you helped me. Everything went well until we poured the **kvas** into the bottles and corked them. Then, in the middle of the night, all hell broke loose. The bottles began to pop their corks. The noise awoke the whole family and every one ran down to the cellar to see what was happening."

"When we got down there, the corks were still popping and the **kvas** was still pouring out of the bottles", I recalled, laughing.

"We ran to pick up the corks and we stuffed them back into the bottles," Sarah went on. "**Bobie** thought a war had started in our cellar."

"We are straying from the subject", I said. "Why do you keep chasing me out of your room?"

"I told you why. We'll talk more about it some other time. We're discussing the **kvas** now," Sarah insisted.

"OK. What about the **kvas**?"

"You were so determined to do it again, it was fun watching you. Nothing stopped you. You had to get the stale rye bread from the baker, the ice from the butcher, the sugar from the grocer, and, of course, you had to pay for everything with your labor."

"Do you remember the trouble we had getting the yeast from the **rebetzin** ?" I asked. "Do you recall how she became suspicious?"

"Your mother doesn't bake **khale** in the middle of the week, so why do you need yeast today?" she asked. "And who's going to pay for it? Something suspicious is happening here!"

"We finally had to bring Mother into the mess, and then the **rebetzin** agreed to sell us the yeast."

I tried to get back to what was bothering me. "You are buttering me up, Sara, to keep me from sneaking into your room".

"No, I'm not. I know you've been doing it already. Do you remember all the money we made?", asked Sarah. "The farmers were glad to get it and to pay for it."

"It was a delicious drink," I recalled. "It was cold and bubbly and on the sour side."

"And you paid me many times over," added Sarah, "and I love you and I enjoy listening to you, but..."

I interrupted, "I forgot to tell you the best thing that happened today! Would you believe this? I saw Hershel again here, in the forest." Of course, I went on to tell her all that had occurred, and how he almost visited us.

Sarah said that some one had told her there was a young man from Koydanov somewhere among us but that no one could get to him.

"I wonder what he looks like," Sarah mused.

CHAPTER 7- THE SLAUGHTER IN KOYDANOV
OCT. 6, 1941

A WALK IN THE WOODS: -NOVEMBER, 1941:

We began to hear strange words over and over again: Judenrat, shkhita, Ghetto, kontributsye, eksekutsye, Ubersiedlung, Schutzstaffel, S.S., Einsatztruppen, Einsamlung, Ukrayiner, Litviner.

What did they all mean? What was happening? In Rubiezewicze it did not take us very long to find out what was taking place and what all those words meant.

Some Jews arrived from Koydanov and told us what had happened in their town. It was not believable. Our entire community was shocked by what we heard: the German S.S. had surrounded the ghetto in Koydanov, marched all its inhabitants to pits that had been especially dug, and then shot every one. Except for a few who had managed to run away, all--men, women, children, young and old- all were slaughtered.

The Jews of Rubiezewicze opened their doors to the Koydanov survivors. We gave them shelter and shared our food with them. Sarah was frantic. She ran from one Koydanov inhabitant to another, trying to find out precisely what had happened. She locked herself in her room, and could neither eat nor sleep. Her face was pale and drawn .

Shut up in her room, Sarah wrote without stopping. We were all worried about her. Mother begged her to eat, and finally tried to force some food into her mouth.

"I can't swallow. Please, Mama, I can't swallow." Mother persisted, however, and did, after a while, get Sarah to eat.

"I must write down what I hear," she explained to us. "I must hide my diary. Where shall I put it?" At the time, no one had an answer for her,

The Jews of Rubiezewicze became greatly alarmed. Day and night they ran to the synagogue to pray and weep, to shout and rail in front of the Holy Ark.

A typhus epidemic broke out. Hunger and sickness engulfed our people. Each day brought new tragedy. The Germans and their helpers rounded up people daily for forced labor. Another horror compounded these misfortunes. My father reported that Latvians and Ukrainians (or, as I heard it, the “Litviner” and the “Ukrayiner”) had devised a plan for delivering would-be escapees to the Germans. Food distribution points were set up. Hungry Jews were promised food and "a good future" or "a happy life" if they signed up for work. The ruse succeeded in many cases. All those Jews who signed up, were handed over to the Germans.

Father told us that some of the peasants were helping individual Jews who managed to get away. But others were aiding the Germans. They got sugar, salt and kerosene in exchange for live Jews.

Sarah now became very restless. She became obsessed with the problem of where to hide her diary. She began to talk to herself:

"They will kill us, too. There is no escape. I must write. The world must be told what is happening here. The diary must not be destroyed." She carried on in this manner until we all became quite nervous.

I kept my mouth shut. I no longer wanted to snoop in her room. She will surely kill me if she ever catches me there, I told myself. She would not come out for meals, in spite of Mother's pleading. Finally Mother went to ask Masha, Sarah's closest friend, to talk with her. Masha made vain efforts to see Sarah several times a day.

"Who can tell where these mean winds of fate will scatter my beloved diary, and where the pages will lie strewn about?" she asked over and over again. She bothered me often about where to hide her beloved diary.

"Let's bury it," she said one day.

"Where? In the cellar, in the ground there?" I asked.

"No, I guess not. It would rot," she said. "In bottles, perhaps...?"

"I don't understand why you should want to bury it. You have always kept it in your room. If you catch me touching it or turning a page, you get furious and shove me out of your room. You never fail to get me; you're very strong!"

"Why do I want to bury it? If you don't see why, you really are stupid. Don't you understand that even if they kill us I would still want the world to know how it all happened?"

"If you want the world to know," I argued, "remember that I am also a part of the world and that I want to know what the devil you are writing. Why do you chase me out and fight with me about it? If I know what's in the diary and I survive, I'll be able to tell others what you wrote. Isn't that true? Then, why don't you let me read it? Why all the mystery? Why are you ready to kill your own younger brother about it? I won't swallow the words just by reading them, you may be sure. After I read it, I'll help you bury it."

"Let's think of something," said Sarah.

"I have an idea," I said, "but I won't tell you what it is until you promise to let me read the diary."

"Very well, I'll make a deal with you," she said. "You may read only what I give you, you will never go into my room unless I call you. How is that?"

"It's not very good, but it's better than being thrown out, kicked and cursed."

Sarah smiled as she put her arm around me. "It is nice to have a little brother to fight with once in a while. But you know I love you, I'm sure."

"I'm not so sure."

"I can't fight with Merre-Liebe and Itsinke; they are too small. Besides, Itsinke is always crying and Merre-Liebe is not well; her eyes are swollen all the time.

"Come on, Let me see what you are writing!"

Slowly, with gentle, loving care, Sarah picked up her diary and turned page after page until she came to the date of March 6, 1942. We sat on the floor. She drew me closer to her and became very quiet and serious.

"Well, what are you waiting for? I can read it myself," I said impatiently.

Sarah began very slowly. As she found the entry, her chin trembled, her voice choked and almost in tears she began.....

"I think of the distant battlefields where our best people are courageously fighting the Germans. They fight and fall, and over their dead bodies a multi-headed mass marches into battle against these injustices.'"

"Isn't the Koydanover a fighter? Aren't the battlefields right here in the Ghetto of Rubiezewicze? Please talk with him! I want to know what it means to be a fighter. I'll bet he is a true war hero!"

"Yes," Sara said. "He used to talk with us in a covert way, so as not to arouse the suspicions of the police. He told us about the woods, about derailing trains, killing Germans, taking their guns and then disappearing. He would always sing that song:

"Zog nit keynmol az du geyst dem letstn veg!...- (Never say you're walking the last road..)" I remember now," Sarah continued, "that we did not pay too much attention to him. He was always a bit nervous."

"We must look for him!" I urged. "He must still be in the ghetto. Or, he could be somewhere near Father's workplace. We'll ask around tomorrow when we go to meet Father. We're supposed to help him carry home what he has earned. It would be really great if we ran into the Partisan on the way..."

Sarah became enthusiastic. "It would be nice if we could sneak out of the ghetto early so we could look around in the forest."

"Just imagine!" I went on excitedly, "We would not have to worry about the police, about work, or anything. We should rise early so we can do that. And as for hiding your diary, let's talk with Father about it and hear what he suggests."

"I can hardly wait", said Sara, closing her diary. It's getting dark now. I can't read or write any more. So I'll take Merre-Liebe and you take Itsinke and we'll get them into bed."

We had a difficult time getting Yitzkhok to bed. He cried for Father. He curled against me, holding on to my neck with his little hands and he whispered haltingly. (His stuttering had worsened as things had gotten worse).

"It's so nice to be with you", he said. I assured him that I would always be near and that I would never leave him. I hugged him repeatedly and he finally fell asleep against my chest.

In what seemed like a little while, my sister's lips brushed my forehead and she whispered that it was time for us to go to. As she spoke Sarah removed Yitzkhok's little hands from around my neck without waking him. With a feeling of guilt I crept out of bed.

"Let's get dressed. Don't waste too much time. Here are your things," said Sarah.

I rubbed my eyes. "You're crazy. It's still dark".

"Come here. Come to the window," Sarah called. "See how beautiful it is out there. The darkness of the night is beginning to vanish and the sun is just about ready to appear on the horizon. Can't you hear the night saying to the sun? `I've finished my tasks; now yours are about to begin.?'"

"You are always hearing things that nobody else does," I complained.

She stood combing her hair. "How long do you think it will take us to get to Father?" she asked, Then she answered herself: "I don't care it if takes forever, just so we are out of the ghetto- even for a little while."

Mother suddenly appeared out of nowhere. "Where are you going so early? It is still so dark! It's dangerous..."

"You know where we go on Fridays", we answered. Sara tried to reassure her: "Please, Mother, don't worry and don't cry. Why the fuss? We always do this."

"I understand that the two of you have to get out of the ghetto. But you never leave so early...! Please, if you should meet any stranded refugees from Koydanov on your way, be sure to help them. Show them how to reach our house."

"We will, we will."

We were just about read to leave when Mother said: "For this Friday, I've prepared something special for you to take along--two hard boiled eggs and some bread."

"Please, Mother, no. We will not take it."

She insisted and Sarah continued to argue. "You and the little ones need it more than we do. Besides, whenever we go far, Father always stops at the Wojczeks' farm. We help him with his cows, watch him milk them, and we feed the chickens. His barn is full of hay. It smells so good!...Yakov loves to play with their dog. It jumps at him and licks his face."

"Let us leave now, Mama, please," I begged. "And don't worry. Everything will be all right."

We kissed the **mezuzah**, gave Mother a quick hug and started out. We soon passed Koydanover Street. Once we went by Sore-Etl's mill, the ghetto was behind us. Sarah turned her head towards me.

"It's great to be out of there!" She was smiling happily and walking so fast that I had difficulty keeping pace with her.

"Let' s see if you can catch me", she called, starting to run. We raced all the way to the Wojczek house.

The dog began barking to announce our approach. Mrs. Wojczek stood at the door, waiting for us.

"Come in, come in. Oh, it's so good to see you! How is Shoshka and the rest of your family? We heard what happened to the Jews of Koydanov. Our Priest told us to help them, to hide and feed them. Every Sunday his sermon is about brotherhood. He says that it is not in the Christian tradition to deliver Jews to the Germans in exchange for a bag of salt or sugar or a liter of kerosene. We have a fine priest. He is on your side."

Mr. Wojczek, who had joined us by that time, nodded his head in agreement.

"I can't understand what is going on. Why should there be all this terror? You are always welcome here."

His wife put her arms around our shoulders and led us into the kitchen. "Come, sit down, children."

Her husband joined us for breakfast. We all bowed our heads while the farmer prayed. The pancakes, served with sour milk, were delicious. We had not had any for a long time. The dog remained beside me, vigorously wagging his tail.

"Even he does not like the police," said the woman. "He would tear them apart. They are afraid to come in here. And if they were to come this way, the dog would warn us. so we would be able us to hide you. I know what a risk you take when you try to leave the ghetto. I've heard some nasty stories."

Sarah became nervous. "We had better go," she said. "We don't wish to create an unpleasant situation for you."

The woman assured her we were always welcome. Then she wrapped some goodies in a bag. "Here, take this. It'll be something to munch on while you travel...Wait here a moment. My husband will make sure that it is safe for you to leave." They both made the sign of the cross.

"May God protect and save you", they said. We thanked them for their hospitality.

"You are beautiful people", they said. "We will pray for you. We hope to see the day when your comings and goings will not be fraught with fear! Please give our regards to your Father and Mother, to your **Bobie** and the little ones. Tell them we love them all."

As we hurried on towards the Shimkowitz forest we could see that an attempt had been made to clear it of war material. Here and there however, were an old shoe, a gas mask, some military vehicles.

We sat down to rest at the edge of the woods. Rubiezewicze lay before us. Sarah began to admire our **shtetl**.

"Look how majestic it looks from here.! It's almost like a story book." She rested one hand on my shoulder and pointed with her other one.

"Look downhill, all the way to your right. That building with the high tower was once the Polish military barrack. Close by is the tall Church that seems to almost reach the sky. The Polish government built it for religious and political reasons. When the bells in that Church steeple start ringing on Sunday, they can be heard for miles and miles. The Poles wanted representatives of the Russian government to see the Church and to hear its chimes. They had their reasons. The border between the two countries was only a mile or two beyond our **shtetl**, and the Church was meant to demonstrate to the Russians how the Poles felt about religion. But when the Russians invaded Poland in 1939, their first objective was the removal of the huge bell.

Away over to your left is one of the oldest Churches in Poland. It is rumored that a saint is buried there. We do know that every year, in early Spring, the storks invade the old Church. They noisily build their nests on its roof.

And in the center of Rubiezewicze you can see our **shul**. It is not very tall, but is recognizable by its dome.

Then there are the two rivers that encompass Rubiezewicze. On one side is the Visal River, on the shore of which Getsel's mill is located, and on the other is the Pregel. Sore-Etl's mill is on its bank. I don't know where these rivers start, but they empty into the Niemen. You can see the bridges, spanning both rivers. In 1939, the Polish government mined those bridges in an attempt to stop the Russian army. But the bridges were not destroyed. When the invaders entered Rubiezewicze they recognized it as a typical Polish village. The Russian commander is reported to have said: "'When I looked over the **shtetl** and its beautiful surrounding area, I issued orders that it not be harmed.'"

"Just think," Sarah went on, as though she were really talking to herself. "There is so much horror and pain inside, so much hunger and ugliness, while outside there is beauty and tranquillity. How can these two situations go together? Please, God, bring a little peace to our unfortunate people. Please...! Ease their misery, heal their sickness, allay their fear, pain and degradation. Deliver them from their helplessness, Oh, God, relieve their hunger and despair! Lead them here, to the Shimkowitz forest where they may inhale the fresh air and appreciate the beauty of their **shtetl**. Let them see what only You could create, and revel in its panoramic grandeur. Let them glory in Your skies with their vivid colors; let them see and feel the warmth of Your sun's rays. Show them the trees swaying majestically, let them listen to the paean of the birds in their tribute to You! Oh God! You are tearing me and our people apart. You are torturing us without end. How is this possible? How can You create much breathtaking beauty and, at the same time, so much unspeakable horror?" She rested her head on my shoulder.

"Remember that we don't have to go back to the ghetto," I said. "We can join the Partisans. That is why we woke so early, so we could explore the woods in our neighborhood and perhaps run into the Koydanover Partisan, the one who talked about train derailments, killing Germans and confiscating their guns. We can't allow them to kill as they did the Koydanover. Let's go to Father now. We'll tell him we want to become Partisans. We'll tell him about the activities of Koydanover, derailing trains, killing Germans and taking their guns."

Sarah looked troubled. "Please don't talk about killing. You've used the word several times. If I have to do what the Koydanover and the Partisans do, I can't become one of them."

"Well, let's say I agree with you," I replied. "Does that mean we must remain in the ghetto and wait until they surround us, take us to pits, and kill us like they did to the Koydanover? Answer that question, will you?"

"No", said Sara. "We shouldn't do that either."

"Well, then, it's high time we all left the Ghetto and ran into the woods. It would be easy for us here. I know this area well. We used to come here to play and to do other things."

"Like what?" Sarah asked.

"You know the youth organization called `**Betar'**?"

"You belong to it, don't you?"

"I do, that's right. And do you know what we do? We learn how to survive in a wilderness, how to find food, which plants are poisonous, how to cook what we find, how to hunt for rabbits and other animals, how to build a shelter in the ground, and how to shoot with bow and arrow--all sorts of things."

"What other things? Tell me. Tell me!"

"Do you know what happened one day? Our leader killed a rabbit with his bow and arrow. He skinned it. Then he built a fire,- without matches, mind you. He then roasted the rabbit over the flame and we had a delicious meal."

`There is so much food in the forest,' he would always say.

"And do you know what we did at night? We made a bonfire to keep ourselves warm. Then we went to the nearest potato field, dug up some potatoes, and roasted them in the fire. They were delicious. We would also sing songs as the flames lit up the sky. We sang `**hatikva'**. That and the song `mayn harts iz in mizrekh/un ikh bin in mayrev' (my heart is in the East but I am in the West)".

"Sing them for me, sing them for me!"

I began `**hatikva'**.

"Oh," said Sarah. "I know that one. It's not just a song. It's our national anthem."

"What's a national anthem?"

"Do you remember when your teacher asked you to memorize 'Yestohe Polska nie zgineta' and practice it with a classmate? That was the Polish National Anthem. Every country has its own. Our people have one, too, but we have no country, and that's our problem. If we had our own state, we would have an army and no one would dare kill us. Do you understand that? Some day we will have our own land. We'll sing our anthem freely, everywhere, not only in the woods... Let's sing it now. It's such a beautiful melody! This is not just a poem set to music. It is about "tikva' and that means `hope'. And that is what we must do,- hope" she added.

"Let's hope the Koydanover is around here so he can show us the area. Where are you, Koydanover?" I chimed in.

"And let's hope the police don't catch us and we all survive."

"What does `survive' mean?"

"The Koydanover is alive. Almost everyone in his town was murdered. Those few who were left alive are survivors."

"Oh, so that's what it means? Well, it's time we stopped hoping and started doing."

"We'll surprise Father," said Sarah. "We'll be early. There are so many things we should talk about with him."

"Like what?"

"We must discuss hiding the diary, joining the Partisans, leaving the ghetto, organizing a school..." As she spoke she opened the bag of goodies the Wojczeks had given us.

"We'll eat these while we hurry to Father," she said.

We left the Shimkowitz Forest and headed for the village of Shimkowitz, once again rushing to father. We could hardly wait to see his happy face when he caught sight of us. His embrace was a gift from heaven. He always choked up when he embraced us. He smiled and cried at the same time.

I asked Sarah how he could do it. "It is an amalgam of pain, sorrow and happiness", she explained. "Our Father is a wonderful man -the best of fathers. He loves us so much, it hurts him. I'm going to write about him in my diary, and I'll let you read it."

"Oh! Yeah? I don't believe it."

"How is that you are so early?" Mr. Janusz greeted us with his little daughter beside him. Her name was Zilina and she was about 9 years old. She was happy to see us.

"Let me show you the new shoes that your Father made for me." She took me by the hand and showed them to me.

"Here they are, over here. You, too, Sarah; come in here and look at my new shoes. Your Father made them for me. He fixed my doll, too, and he cut my hair! How do you like it, Yakov? Didn't he give me a nice haircut? Isn't it pretty?"

"Do you know what else your father did? Our mother's sheep gave birth to a baby and your father helped the mother sheep. I don't know just what he did, but afterwards he brought the baby lamb and the mother into the house. He said it was too cold for them in the barn and they would die if they stayed out there. How does he know those things? He knows everything. Come, I'll show you the newborn. Here it is. Isn't it adorable? Watch it drink milk from my hand... Here, now you take it."

I took the lamb from her but didn't know what to do with it. I began to pet it. It did not seem to mind. Sarah came over and began caressing it, while Zilina stood by and watched with approval. Mr. and Mrs. Janusz also watched as Zilina showed off the baby lamb.

"Whatever your Father does, he does with love," said Mrs. Janusz. "I must tell you this," she continued. "I had a severe cold- coughing and a pain in my back. Your Father cured me. He applied cupping glasses. Now I feel much better. My husband tried to do it but he could never get the cups to stick to my body. He always made a mess, whenever he tried it. He thought it was funny, but I felt as if I were being burned alive. Your Father did it easily and in no time at all."

"He is just like your Grandfather. He, too, was an honest hard-working man with room in his heart for everyone. Your Father never tells us how much to pay him for his work. Come with me; let me show you what we have prepared for him to take home. Here are eggs, carrots, cheese, a sack of flour and these are potatoes. I also included a bottle of milk. I have it in the cellar. Do you think your father will be pleased?"

Mr. Janusz interrupted his wife.

"She always feels we don't pay him enough."

"My Father will be very happy," Sarah replied. "You may be sure of that. You too are fine and hard working. And you are compassionate and kind. You reciprocate in full measure. If we just said `thank you' that wouldn't adequately express our feelings. We love you."

Zilina picked up a carrot.

"Here Yakov, eat it. It is sweet as sugar." She took some cucumbers and wrapped them in a bag. "I want to give these to Yakov. May I, Mother?"

"Of course you may. We have all put something extra into the package."

At this point I became a little anxious.

"Mr. Janusz, where is Father?" I asked.

"It's all right. Don't worry. He's not very far away."

"May I see him?"

"Of course, of course. Do you see that house over there, the one with the new straw roof? You can't miss it. The Podolskys live there."

I ran towards that house. When I was about half way there, my Father spotted me. We rushed towards each other. I could hardly catch my breath as we embraced.

"Where is Sarah? Didn't she come?"

"She is so stupid! She is still talking with the Januszes."

"Oh, there she is. She is running towards us," said Father. He tried to lift us both at once but, finding that impossible, he put me on his shoulder and embraced Sarah.

The Januszes came up. "Your Father is safe," said Mr. Janusze. "Nothing will happen to him here. We all love him."

"How is it that you are here so early today?" Father asked. "Is everything all right in the ghetto? Is Mommie all right, and Itchinke, Merre-Liebe, and **Bobie**? What's happened? Please tell me!"

"Nothing unusual has happened. Every one is fine," said Sarah reassuringly. "We just felt like coming early."

Father turned to Mr. Janusz.

"Please forgive us. It's just that we are a worrying family."

"I understand you quite well," replied Mr. Janusz. He turned to look at Sarah and me.

"I want you to know, children, how much your Father is doing for the stranded survivors from Koydanov. He found work for ten or twelve of them among the farmers around here."

"I could not have done it without your help," Father hastened to add. "If I ever have the honor of meeting your priest I'll tell him what wonderful Christians you are. The survivors of Koydanov and I want you to know we are grateful to you."

Then Father turned to us. "You two wait here. I'll go over to the Podolskys and tell them we are going home now and that I'll finish the work next week." He hurried off.

When he came running back, he had a large loaf of bread under each arm.

"They've just come out the oven," he explained. "I haven't even finished the work, yet, but the Podolskys are already paying me. Isn't that nice of them?" When we returned to the Janusz's place the horse and buggy were ready. We all helped to load it.

"We'll try to take you as close to the ghetto as possible. After that, you know what you must do," said our friend.

It was time to part with Mrs. Janusza and Zilina, who had her arms full of lamb and doll as she tried to kiss me good-bye. We all hugged Mrs. Janusz. She embraced us warmly and made the sign of the cross as she said:

"May God protect you and save you." We all thanked her sincerely. Then we jumped into the wagon and, with a whistle from Mr. Janusz to the horse, we moved out.

Sarah and I always enjoyed that ride. We sang and played around while Father and Mr. Janusz chatted. Before long we arrived at the Shimkowitz Forest, where we always unloaded the food before carrying it into the ghetto on our backs. We soon spied the hole in the ground where we hid the food and covered it with twigs until it seemed safe to enter the ghetto with it. Father was an expert in concealing the bundles.

"Whatever your Father does he does with perfection," said Janusz. "No one would ever suspect that anything was hidden in that hole."

We all hugged and thanked Janusz for his generosity. The next moment, the horse responded to the whistled direction and was off along the dusty trail.

The sun seemed about ready to descend on the dome of our Synagogue. In an hour or two it would disappear for a night of rest, and darkness would envelop the streets of the ghetto. By then, Sarah and I would be ready to take home Father's well earned goods. We would probably have to make two trips, for there was too much for one, and it would be too heavy.

As we stood there thinking about it, Sarah said:

"Do you know why we came early, Father? We need your opinion. Where do you think we should hide the diary? What would be a safe place? You know I am writing about the horrors that I see and feel. Even if we are killed, the world still must know how we met our end."

"Also, Yakov is obsessed with the idea of becoming a Partisan. We hoped that we might meet the one fighter from Koydanov here in Shimkowitz Forest, so we rested there for a while. In the meantime, while we scouted around, we sang songs and talked. One of the songs was `**hatikva'** and I told Yakov what it meant. Then Yakov told me all the things he learned in his **Betar** group- how to survive in the woods, how to find food, start a fire without matches, and a good many other useful survival skills."

"While he was talking, I was admiring the beauty of our **shtetl** as as it is seen from the edge of the forest here. Come, Father, let me show you what I mean. Let's go out there a little way, to the edge. No one could possibly steal your earnings.

They are so well camouflaged; I could certainly never find them. So come, come. I don't know whether we'll ever see anything so beautiful. Only God could have created it."

She took a step backward, raised her arms halfway, looked directly at the sun and began to recite:

"Oh, take not from me my silvery dream,
But let me drown my sorrow in its gleam.
I've tasted no joy in reality--
In dreams, then, let forgetfulness come to me!

Oh, let me spin out my fancies of silver-!
In dreams let my spirit run free.
With no space in my life for my desire--
At least let me dream and, dreaming, expire!"

"How do you know that poem?" asked Father. "Where did you hear it? Did you read it somewhere?"

"I thought you were going to tell Father about how ugly it is inside the ghetto and how beautiful it is outside," I reminded Sarah.

"Wait a moment. Wait," said Father abruptly, turning to Sarah. "That is one of the poems your Mother used to recite when we were keeping company!"

"Who is Mother? Who *was* she?" Sarah asked. "Please tell me who this Shoshka is who recited poetry to you when you were courting her. The Shoshka you married- what was she like?"

"I thought we were here to talk about hiding the diary, and about Partisans, and so on," I broke in. "Instead, you talk about Shoshka. She is your Mother and mine, and Yitzkhok's and Merre-Liebe's and Yentel's, and you know that. And she cries a lot and gives all our food away to the people of Koydanov, that's all."

"That isn't all," Father corrected me. "She was and is someone special. Come, let's sit down. Jet me tell you who Sonia/ Shoshka was."

"The war between Russia and Poland was ending. The Russian Revolution was having its problems. There were many unsettled matters. One of them was the border between Poland and Russia. The people of a number of towns- Rubiezewicze among them-, did not know whether they would be under Russian or Polish rule. Pilsudski's armies dug in around Minsk, Koydanovo, Rubiezewicze and Stolpce, all the way to the Niemen River. This led to a sort of standstill. Two of my sisters and one of my brothers settled in Minsk and married. Another sister emigrated to America. I remained at home with my parents and helped **Zeyde** in his leather business. He manufactured a variety of shoe styles. In addition, he traveled to Minsk frequently to purchase supplies of leather goods for the trade. On one of those trips I accompanied

him and was introduced to a group of young people who called themselves `**Bundistn**.' In towns with a Jewish population they would arrange meetings where speeches were delivered and debates about the prospects for the Jewish people took place. The '**Bundistn**' believed that the future could be a happy one, that there would be no more pogroms, that under the desired new Socialist order the so-called Jewish problem would be solved. All the world would be free, our people included."

Sarah and I sat quietly listening. Father was also sitting. He shifted his position a little, closed his eyes, inclined his head and continued to talk very emotionally. At one meeting I attended a distinguished-looking gentleman entered the room and immediately all the commotion stopped.

`Thank you, comrades, thank you', the man said. `Although her family, parents, four sisters and three brothers, live not far from here in the town of Cusda, just a few kilometers away, the lady I am about to introduce comes to us from Kharkov- a long way from Minsk. She is a seamstress. She is a leader of the **Bund** movement in the Kharkov region. She will recite a poem.

`Here she is, comrades: Sonia Galperin!'

Father looked up at the sun. "I can see her now entering the room", he went on. "Chestnut brown hair, blue eyes set deep in a round face, her ready smile highlighting her high cheekbones. Her long hair covered her shoulders. Instant applause greeted her as she stepped to the center of the podium."

"Then her smile faded and she began to recite: `Oh, take not...'"

I had never seen my father so overcome by his own words. He wiped away the tears that glistened in his eyes. Placing his arms around us, he continued his reminiscences:

"I had heard quite a number of speeches at that time, but Sonia's was something special." To characterize her style of delivery, Father told us a story:

"A well-known entertainer came to a town to perform. The huge auditorium was filled to capacity. Tremendous applause greeted the man as he appeared on the stage. He recited chapter ten verse five: "The Shepherd.... When he finished his performance, he received a standing ovation, sustained applause and many cries of `Bravo!' After a few minutes he said:

`Now, with your kind permission, I should like to introduce our **Rebbe**.'

`Modestly attired, his beard not too well groomed, the **Rebbe** spoke:

`Ladies and gentlemen, I shall recite Chapter ten, verse five, "The Shepherd....' At the end of his delivery, there was no thundering applause, no standing ovation. Instead, all present were crying.

The chairman approached the well-known entertainer. `Tell me this, please,' he said `both of you used the same text. Why was there such a marked difference in the reaction of the audience?'

`I'll tell you the reason,' replied the entertainer. `I know the verse well, but he knows the Shepherd.'

"When your Mother finished reciting her poem the audience seemed electrified. Most people were crying."

"Please tell us more about Sonia," begged Sarah. Father sat silent and motionless for a while. Then, regaining his composure he continued.

"Well, as the meeting progressed many questions were asked of Sonia. She answered them all in an interesting way and with dignity. There was however, one heckler who did tried his utmost to upset her."

`Dear Sonietshka,' he began. `The ideals of the **Bund** are laudable, but how can they eradicate anti-Semitism? Don't you see how intense anti-semitism is among the elite of the new order? They talk of **Biro-Bidjan**, but all they want is to see us sequestered in one place. A country of our own, as the Poles have - that is a different story. You see, Sonietshka, your talents and dedication should be utilized in helping us acquire a homeland, of our own. And that is Israel, Israel the one and only country that is truly ours.'

Many hisses and boos followed his remarks. But the beautiful young lady did not lose her composure. She raised her hand and asked for quiet. She was magnetic. Silence was restored in an instant. Then she spoke:

`This young man has a message and we should listen regardless of whether we agree with him or not. Please, come here', she motioned. As he approached the platform and sat down next to Sonietshka I was consumed with jealousy and wished that I was there sitting beside her.

"A dialogue ensued. There were many questions from the audience and just as many answers. Finally, Sonia said:

"Your ideas are quite contradictory to our beliefs. However, I'll convey your misgivings to the **Bund** leadership in Kharkov."

He said, `I'll go anywhere to spread the message that Israel is the only homeland for us, not **Biro-Bidjan**.' The meeting drew to a close.

"Everyone tried to shake hands with Sonietshka including me, but I could not get close to her."

"But you eventually did, you married her," Sarah said. "Tell us what happened."

"I'll tell you another time. Or, you could ask Mother what happened. But now we must get ready to take the food home. They'll be waiting for us on the other side, so we should get there on time. It's getting dark; we must hurry."

We removed the camouflage from the hiding place, and we put on our rucksacks. Father checked them to see whether they could hold more.

"With a little extra effort we won't have to make a second trip," he said. "Let's take everything. We'll be all right."

Soon Shimkowitz Forest was behind us. So was Wojcek's house. We heard their dog bark as we went by. As we approached Sore-Etl's mill, father said:

"We'll rest here, beside the trees and the water. The two of you had better wait here while I see whether we should go by way of the bridge or wade across. The water is not very deep at this spot you know."

It felt good to take the load off our backs.

"Do you remember the whistle signal?" Father asked. "Let's hear it." He whistled. We replied with two short sounds. Sarah had a difficult time doing it, but she learned fast. Father was satisfied and went off. By that time it was pitch dark. Just a short time later we heard the signal and we answered. In a few minutes, Father was back with us.

"There's no one in the entire area. We'll cross the bridge unless you youngsters want to take a swim. We'll have no trouble entering the ghetto".

Mother was at her lookout point. Father whistled. She replied. She was very good at it.

"I want to remind you that as soon as we enter the ghetto we must walk as fast as possible," Father whispered.

I could feel Mother's tears as she hugged us.

"Oh, God, you are so.....she sighed. "How could you carry such a load?"

"Don't worry, Mama," I assured her. "We'll make it." And we did.

She was all smiles as we entered the house. When **Bobie** smiled, every one else had to smile also. The two little ones looked at the good things we brought, and found that they, too, had something to smile about.

"Mother, I must tell you something," I said later that evening. "I have to get it off my chest. Do you know why we rose so early this Friday morning?"

"Why?" asked Mother.

"For several reasons. We wanted to decide on a place to hide the diary. We were also hoping to establish contact with the Partisans to see if we could join them. Instead, Father and Sarah talked about some strange things. They spoke about something called the `**Bund'** and they paid no attention to anything I said."

"A-ha! And what else did they talk about?" She became curious.

"Father recalled your recitation of a poem in Minsk, and told us that you were from some **shtetl** called Cusda, near Kharkov. Then they spoke about some **Rebbe**. Sarah was supposed to show Father how beautiful it was outside and how ugly inside the ghetto. I don't know; I can't understand the whole thing. Father was wiping away tears; He was very emotional. I didn't understand what it was all about. It was so boring!

"Oh, yes! And then Father talked about wanting to shake your hand and how he couldn't get near you after you read the poem. That made me laugh. And Sarah said he certainly did get near you; you married him. They made me feel so stupid! I must admit: we sat there for a long time while they talked nonsense.

"Sarah wanted to know who Sonietshke was, so I told her that she was you, but she ignored me. Everyone does that to me, except the little ones. They are always on my side."

"Don't you want to know who your mother is?" Sarah asked.

"Everybody knows Mother," I said heatedly. "All the Koydanovers do. They all come here. Ask any one from Rubiezewicz who Shoshke is. They'll tell you. Even the beggars know her; she always gives them something. All the world knows Shoshke."

"Father started to tell us about our Mother, but you were half asleep and bored," Sarah explained. "You weren't even interested. You even seemed to be laughing at us. No one ignores you. You should understand that. When you are a little older, you will want to know who your Mother--the `real' person--is. Father wanted us to really know her, so he began telling us. But you fell asleep. Now, if you'll behave, we'll ask Mother to continue where Father left off."

"What is this all about?" asked Mother. "What do you want me to continue? Where am I supposed to start?"

"Sonietshka," said Father, "you know Sarah. She is always dreaming. We were standing just outside Shimkovitz Forest, admiring the sunset. How beautiful the **shtetl** looked from there! When Sarah began reciting one of your poems- `Oh, take not ...' I felt a chill. Suddenly, I saw you in my mind's eye as you were when I first met you. It was like a dream. A quarter of a century has passed since you made your entrance at that meeting of the **Bund** in Minsk, yet I remember it very vividly. It is

beautiful to think about you. I fell in love with you then, and I still love you dearly....And now, Sonia continue from where I left off."

"I remember all of it," Mother assured him. "And you, Yakov, you had better listen." We all sat down on the floor.

Bobie said: "It sounds interesting already." Sarah began with the poem and went on and on, word for word as Father had related the story. Our parents sat holding hands and fighting back tears. The two young ones fell asleep at **Bobie's** side. I struggled to keep my eyes open, and probably would have dozed off if Sarah nudged me, so I continued to listen. Finally Sarah said:

"Now, please tell us what happened after the meeting."

Father looked at Mother. "Now it's your turn, Sonietshka," he said.

"Oh, my goodness!. Well, let me think a moment. Ah, yes. After that assignment, I had to return to Kharkov. I visited my family in Cusda. I hadn't seen them for a while, so I enjoyed being with them."

"As I journeyed to Kharkov I was bothered by the questions the young man had asked at the meeting and by our ensuing dialog. To some extent I agreed with his position. I tried to find answers."

"The higher echelons in the new Soviet government were becoming suspicious of the **Bund** movement. They made it difficult for us in all kinds of ways. The N.K.V.D. (Soviet Secret Police) questioned some of our leaders and even threatened to arrest them. They cited various reasons for our dissolution, and told us we should espouse the doctrine of the official government party."

"Soon there were splits in our ranks. I did not like this and made several attempts to remedy the situation but I was unsuccessful. When some of our leaders were arrested in Kharkov, Leningrad and in other cities, I knew I would have to find a solution. I decided to abandon all **Bund** activities for a while and wait to see what would happen. I went home, to Cusda."

"A short time later, the **Bund** publications were confiscated and more arrests took place. I was glad that I was not in Kharkov. In the meantime, Lenin had assumed firm control of the Communist party."

"When we learned that the government planned to establish a permanent border between Poland and Russia, we decided to move. Cusda was very close to the proposed border, and would apparently remain part of Russia. I welcomed Mother's decision to move to the Polish side, although we had different reasons for going there.

"My Mother felt that the Communist party was part of a godless movement and she wanted nothing to do with anything so perverse. My reason was to save the **Bund** and its leaders, who were seeking ways to get out of Russia. Through various contacts

we learned what was happening in Russia , and we expected the worst. We therefore formed an organization we named `**Yene Yatn**' (Those Fellows). Its purpose was to smuggle as many of our comrades as possible out of Russia, to safety in Warsaw, Vilno and Bialystok. I was in contact with '**Yene Yatn**'."

"My mother (My father died when I was very young; I hardly remember him) and we children--seven of us--made ready to move. Our belongings were loaded onto the wagon and we moved off."

"We crossed the border without incident into the Polish town of Rubiezewicze ('Rubzevits'), the transit point on the Polish side, and therefore an ideal place for our purposes. Rubzevits had a substantial number of Jews and we immediately made our way to the **shul**. At the time, we were the only family in the Synagogue. Four beautiful sisters, three handsome brothers and a tall, distinguished looking mother in her middle forties, ready to start a new life."

"Mother knew a man in Rubzevits whom she described to us. His name was Reb Gershon. He had stopped at our house in Cusda on his way Minsk. I was often away busily engaged in political activities, but my brothers and sisters knew **Reb** Gershon. He would tell them all sorts of stories, and was always welcome in our house. He had a good sense of humor, a ready smile, and was a shrewd businessman. He dealt in leather and he manufactured shoes."

"As soon as **Reb** Gershon found out that there were new arrivals at the Synagogue he came running. Without any hesitation, he said: `You will stay with us. Get ready. In the meantime I'll go home and tell my wife to make preparations for you.'

"We felt good knowing that someone took a genuine interest in us. That was a happy interlude in a difficult time. As we waited for **Reb** Gershon to return my mother said:

`Come, children. Let me tell you a story **Reb** Gershon told me.' We all sat down, all seven of us, in a semi-circle, eager to listen to our mother. She began:

`One Sunday morning we were awakened by a great commotion outside. What caused it? Tsar Nicholas of Russia was coming to hunt in the nearby wilderness of Bialowesz. His party would be passing through Rubiezewicze and young and old of the town were out to catch a glimpse of the Tsar. The best viewing place, **Reb** Gershon said, was a roof, so he clambered up on his roof to see hundreds of horses and soldiers clad in bright uniforms, bearing rifles with bayonets go marching by. Rubiezewicze gave the Czar the warmest of receptions. Bread and salt were showered upon the soldiers from the roof-tops. The town was overwhelmed and so was **Reb** Gershon. On his way back from the hunting ground the Tsar reciprocated. This time he was hailed not only by the inhabitants of Rubiezewicze but also by the people of all the towns and villages in the surrounding area. All the Church paintings, tapestries and other representations of Jesus and Mary were carried in greeting to the royal visitor and the bells rang incessantly.

`Every one gathered in the center of Rubiezewicze, where the Tsar's personal band of musicians and his chorus exhibited their renowned talents. Rubiezewicze never forgot that event, nor did **Reb** Gershon. However, one question about it troubled him. Not a single animal had been slain by the Tsar. He left for Petrograd empty-handed. Had the animals outmaneuvered the emperor?'

"All of us were engrossed in Mother's story and did not notice **Reb** Gershon standing quietly nearby, listening to his story being narrated by my Mother. As she finished her account he came forward and said:

`Oh, Merre-Liebe (That was Mother's name), you did not forget! You related it well... This is my son, David.'

"David walked right over to me and said: `Sonietshka, I heard your poem, 'Oh, take not...' at the **Bund** meeting. I tried to approach you to offer my congratulations, but my effort was not successful. I left for home disappointed and heartbroken. I never thought that I'd meet you again, but here you are! I have come here to welcome you all to our home.'"

Father was in tears. **Bobie's** mouth hung open, displaying her gums. The two little ones were still asleep. Sarah was completely engrossed.

"And now you know something about your mother," she concluded.

"Please "What a stupid question!" I commented. "I'll tell you. They fell in love, married and raised a family. That's what happened."

Sarah put her hand over my mouth and warned me not to interrupt as Mother continued:

"Yes, we did fall in love. Father was, and is a great man, a loving one. It was exciting to be with him. He was a Zionist; I was a **Bundist**- two different ideologies- two totally diverse approaches toward achieving the same goal. Although he did not like that man who questioned me at that meeting, he identified and with his patience, tolerance, fairness, logic and, above all, because we had a genuine love for each other, he gradually converted me to Zionism. It was stimulating to be with your father then, and it still is. His love songs did not fade with time. His voice became even each other then and we continue to complement each other now."

A tear now glistened in Mother's eye. She wiped it away as she continued:

"I was fortunate to have been sent from distant Kharkov tothat meeting in Minsk. I was lucky to come to Rubzevits and there meet the man of my life. And then our first child was born, Yentel. Our joy was indescribable. We were in seventh heaven. Then Sarah, Yakov, and after him Merre-Liebe, and finally Yitzkhok. Every one of you was and will remain a shining star in our lives. With all of you among us our lives were fulfilled. We worked in tandem. It was not easy to earn a living in

such a small shtetl. Still, we somehow managed to have enough food on the table. To see you wearing a new pair of shoes and neatly dressed for the Sabbath was always a beautiful experience. All five of you made our hard labors seem easy. My one wish now is that Yentel could be with us. Who could ask for anything more?"

"But now my beloved has to risk his very life to keep us alive, and he is doing it with every ounce of his strength. Nothing is too difficult for him. Nothing."

"Sarah, darling, you wanted to know who Sonietshke is. Here she is."

"You wished to know about David, here he is, beside me, indelibly, etched in my heart. Life without him would be meaningless. I would die.".

"As you all know only too well," Mother went on, "we are in a very dangerous situation. Our very lives are in jeopardy. Just imagine: A kilo of salt and a jug of kerosene could induce a peasant to drag a Jew to be shot by a German, and there are so many of them all around us! We must find a way out! Right now the hunted ones are the Koydanover, but before long we'll be the prey. We must find a way out! We must!"

She turned to Father: "What do you think, my beloved? How do we go about it? How can we save ourselves?"

"That was quite a speech you made," he replied. "You brought back pleasant memories and made me feel as if I were back in Minsk among the young people listening to you recite `Oh take not.." -except that this time the lucky young man sitting next to you is me and your audience is your children, your hecklers now, twenty years later. I am still so very much in love with you. You are just as beautiful as you were then and you are still the very core of my life. You will always be there, until my last breath. Twenty-odd years ago you fought for a better world, now we are struggling for our very existence... Yes, I've been working on an idea in answer to your question: How do we go about surviving? But first let me ask your audience what we ought to do. Sarah, darling, you are the eldest. Let's hear from you first."

"If Yentel were with us, she would be the eldest. Since I'm next in line, I guess it's my turn," Sarah responded. "The only weapons I have are my words. Can I fight the Germans with them? Let me turn the question over to the one who should answer after me, your very own heckler, Yakov. He has some young ideas."

But instead of letting me speak, she continued. "He wants to go into the woods to become a Partisan and do insane things like derailing trains, killing Germans and so on. I told him that I cannot kill, not even a fly. I don't really know what he expects from me. I have no answers. I do have many questions and many words, but that's all." She turned to Mother.

Mother said: "In a way, Yakov makes sense. There does not seem to be any other way to save ourselves. We are being hunted like animals. There's no protection for our people, no law to defend us. Isn't that plain to see?"

Bobie became angry. "This child is crazy. He is out of his mind. You little stinker, what would you do in the woods? How would you fight the Germans?"

"We'll find ways." I was confident.

"Time will teach us," Sarah offered.

"With no roof over your heads? You'd leave the house and everything that is in it? How would you get food? Suppose you became ill?"

"How do the animals stay alive?" I asked.

"Don't worry, **Bobie**," said Sarah, comfortingly.

Bobie had her own ideas: "We can't live like animals. We are human beings. Don't ever forget that!...I'm not going anywhere. I'll stay right here. They'll have to shoot me where I am, in my own house."

Father turned to Mother. "We've heard **Bobie**, Sarah and Yakov speak. Now it is your turn, my beloved."

"A bloody war is raging," Mother began. "Russia, England and America have joined forces to fight the Nazis. All of the occupied territories and their millions of people are against them. They can't fight the whole world! Their collapse is imminent. Still, the question remains: How can we survive until this happens? If the Germans surround our Ghetto the way they did Koydanov, there will be no escape. Therefore, the only option we have is to leave this place as soon as possible."

"It is interesting that we have each offered a different idea without realizing we were doing so. Yakov wants to go into the woods to become a Partisan. Sarah wishes to write--perhaps in the Partisan movement. Father would prefer to work for the peasants. I am a seamstress, I could work for them as well. **Bobie** wants to remain here, at home. Merre-Leibe and Yitzkhok could tend the animals."

We were all listening very attentively to what Mother had to say. She gave us all a sense of strength. Sarah was overjoyed. I, too, felt good. Mother did not object to my joining the Partisans.

Father kept repeating: "I hope your idea works. I'm going to work at it," he promised.

Mother interrupted him. "There is one thing I forgot to mention, and it is very important," she stressed. "Each and every one of us must work in a different place, and we must watch out for each other and remain close. With determination and the help of God we shall overcome until liberation."

Father put his arm around her shoulder. He drew us all closer and said: "If anything should happen to the house of Gershon, at least one of us must survive. I don't know who that lucky one--or unlucky one-- will be. Let us link our souls in prayer and respectfully demand of the Almighty that at least one of us be spared. And, should He want to destroy the house of Gershon...we will still continue to pray- for the survival of Sarah's diary. It must live forever."

I became very quiet for a while. Sarah's voice broke the stillness of that solemn moment. "Where do we hide the diary?" she asked. "Perhaps we should try to get in touch with the Priest somehow? Should we leave it with one of your peasants? Take it with us wherever we go or just conceal it in the house?" She went on as though she were talking to herself, until she ran out of suggestions. She was forlorn.

Bobie came to the rescue. "Leave it right here, in the house, she said. "You may be sure I'll guard it until they shoot me. What could they do with this book--if you can call it a book? They will never kill it. Now I would like to ask one thing of you before I go to sleep," she added. "Once a week, preferably on **shabes**, we should all gather so you can visit your old **Bobie** in this house of Gershon and we'll all share the week's experiences." She said good night to all of us and walked away. It was late, and we were running out of firewood.

Father suggested that we seriously consider all the options before we make a decision. Now it was time for all of us to get some sleep.

When the rest of us rose on the following morning, Father and Sarah were having a disagreement. She was insisting, even begging him not to go to the village that day.

"My heart is filled with dread. I intuitively feel that you ought not go."

"Nothing will happen to me," he reassured her. "Besides, I want to explore Mama's ideas."

Sarah's insistence worried us. Father spoke:

"I don't know what has come over her. Why should this trip today be any different from any previous one. Please don't worry." He hugged us all and closed the door behind him.

Sarah and Mama were in tears, as we all stood at the window following Father's shadow along the road.

CHAPTER 8- FIRE IN THE GHETTO: DECEMBER 6, 1941

I had lots of fun that night. My two younger siblings came running into my room screaming:

"Fire! Fire! The ghetto is burning."

I looked out of the window and saw it was true. The ghetto was in flames. The sky was illuminated by a huge fire and dense smoke was blanketing the entire scene. I rushed into Sarah's room, and before I could tell her what was happening, she started to yell:

"Are you here again? You promised to leave me alone. What kind of stories do you have for me now?"

"The ghetto is burning!" I screamed.

"You, with your crazy ideas, you always find reasons to disturb me."

I yelled; "Fire! Fire!".

Suddenly Mother appeared rushing into Sarah's room informing her about what was happening in the ghetto. She grabbed my hand and said: "let's get out and see what's happening. Let's get closer."

"What do we do first?" She asked herself.

"Let's watch the Fire Brigade in action," I said. "Let's help extinguish the fire."

"How would you do that, you silly boy?"

"Stop asking questions and let's just have a good time."

Sara started to talk to herself. "Should I rush home for a pail and get in line? They started at Getsel's river and by the time they reach the fire pumps, there is only a little water left . We will just be in their way."

"Let's rush home and start packing." I said

The Jewish Fire Brigade was working feverishly. The towns-people came rushing in from all directions to lend a hand. Horses and buggies and barrels of water were rushing to the pumps. They had only one purpose in mind: to stop the fire from spreading.

However, a third house caught fire. We overheard a fireman saying; "if the fire cannot be contained, not only the ghetto but the whole **shtetl** will burn to the ground."

"We are too close to the fire; the heat is becoming very intense. Don't you feel it?" said Sarah. "Let's get out of here."

"You are breaking my wrist, you idiot", I said.

"And you are going to burn alive, you stupid".

She finally managed to pull me away. "If you stayed there a little longer, it would have been the end of you. We must rush home to help with the packing. Mother is alone. The younger two will be of little help. Please, let's go."

"I'm having so much fun; please let me stay. You do what you want and so will I. I'm not going, I don't care if you break my arm."

She released her hold on my wrist, but her sad, tearful face convinced me. Mother was packing. It seemed to me she was not worrying. She went about nonchalantly doing her work until she spotted us.

"Where have you been, you two?" And sort of smiling, Sarah said: "It's so nice to see you smiling Ma! And when you smile, we can't help smiling. What is it that you are so pleased about? Mama, your son is terrible. I literally dragged him away from the fire."

Mother and I went to see what was happening while **Bobie** watched the house. What I saw saddened me. The fire raged on. The anti-Semites- the Germans and their collaborators, were busy trying to extinguish the fire. They wouldn't tolerate disorder. Well, at least they were busy with that. As long as that lasted, they'd there'd be no time left for beating and killing Jews."

"How wonderful it would be if it would continue to burn", Mother said. "The enemies of our people must see the skies brighten in fire and gag on the smoke. They must experience their own destruction. The brutes! Let it burn, oh God, let it burn" Mother cried.

"Let's all get out. Come **Bobie**, you too. The fire will be raging, but it's under control. In time it will be extinguished. However, our situation will not change."

"So what should we do, Mama? Please tell us, lead us. You have always been a fighter for justice. Where do we go? And what do we do now?"

"I'm sure there is no other way, but to fight. We must leave the ghetto as soon as possible."

I could hardly wait to inform Father about the fire and the excitement I experienced. Mother was accustomed to my running off to Father, who was not surprised to see me. He always welcomed me excitedly. For me it was a treat to sneak out of the ghetto, roam the fields and feel Father's warm embrace. He set his work aside, removed his apron and placed me on his lap.

"I am glad you came" he said. "Tell me, what happened? We saw the skies brighten; we knew something happened in Rubzewitz."

Of course, I gave him all the details. He listened carefully as I told him about my dream.

"Strange dream, strange dream, he repeated." He looked somewhat worried.

"Oh! I *am* glad to see you Yakov," the farmer's wife interrupted. "Your father was looking out of the window quite often; now I see why. We were all eager to learn what happened, and you came just in time. Please tell us."

The whole family was anxious to know. I was exhausted, and excited, so father took over. "Thank God for our Jewish Fire Brigade. They extinguished the fire. Without them, the entire town would have burned to the ground."

Something worried my Father and I could not tell what it was. I sensed it and it really bothered me.

The farmer interrupted: "I know the Jewish Fire Brigade, they are good men."

"Monday was market day. It was hustle and bustle, buying and selling, trading and drinking. It is a day for business and fun," he continued. "A fire broke out in the nearby village of Zaretzy; you should have seen how quickly the Jewish Fire Brigade arrived at the scene. Only one house burned down. They worked feverishly to keep the fire from spreading. We thought that the entire village would go down in flames. All the roofs are made of straw, it would take only a spark to start an inferno. How they kept it from engulfing the town was almost miraculous. Wonderful men!"

I wanted to speak with Father but he didn't stop to talk because he was joined by the farmer's wife.

"We loved to come to Rubzewitz on the third of May (Polish Independence Day) and many people streamed into town to watch the parade. It was the Fire Brigade that drew the most and loudest applause. It was fun to watch them. Ladders, hoses, picks and water pumps were mounted on red wagons. The firemen dressed in shining gold helmets and uniforms sang the Polish National Anthem and other patriotic songs."

"I do not understand what the Germans want from us. It was quiet for a while. Maybe it will be again. Don't worry, you are always welcome in our house and as long as we have our priest, nothing will happen to you. The signs that appeared were removed before anybody could read them", she casually mentioned.

"What signs?" I asked Father. He motioned to me not to talk about it.

The farmer's wife asked more about the fire and Father was glad to talk about it. He took a pencil out of the farmer's hand and started to draw a diagram to indicate where the fire started and where it ended. They listened attentively to what Father was explaining in detail. I could not understand what Father was drawing, but I sensed his anxiety. Something had happened.

He finally told me. "Signs appeared in the village of Shimkowitz, warning that any one who hides or protects Jews will be shot. As soon as the signs were posted, the Koydanover Jews, who were hidden by or working for peasants, ripped the signs off."

But word soon spread among the villagers. All the peasants said they would ignore the warning, but Father was very uneasy.

"I am going to write to Mother, describing the situation here. The plan to move from the ghetto should be postponed for a while -until things settle down,- more or less. Go home as fast as you can and give this letter to Mother."

"Why are you back so soon Mother asked?"

I pulled out the letter. She opened it quickly, read it and paled. She called Sarah and Bobie and read the letter to them.

"What do we do now?" Sarah kept repeating.

Mother kept her composure and calmly said: "Yakov, rest awhile and as soon as you are able, you will return to Father and tell him to come back home immediately. Better yet I'll write a note," she said.

"I begged him not to go," Sarah mumbled to herself. "I had a premonition that something awful would happen," her voice was breaking. "Why doesn't he listen? Oh God, I hope he is all right." She kept repeating these words. I became uneasy as she grabbed my hand.

"I'll go with you" she said, "and we'll bring him home. We'll make sure he gets home safely", she added."

I took the note from Mother and ran out of the house and into the road again. Sarah's words haunted me, Mother's calmness worried me, and Father's absence scared me. I was torn apart, but I kept running. Some one on the road passed me, calling, "Hi Yakov." I wondered how he knew my name. Another man walked by and asked me, "why are you running Yakov?"

"How do you know my name and who are you?"

"Your father is all right. Watch over him, though. Be careful. You can hardly catch your breath; why don't you rest? There are no Germans in this area so don't

worry. Your father told us about you. All the Koydanov survivors know you. Of course, you don't know them." I was at ease at last.

"Your Father found work for us around here. He is a great man; he worries about every one. We come to him with our problems. Oh, there he is!"

And there he was with his rucksack on his back. I started to run to Father while he was running towards me. "Here is a note from Mother."

The rest of us left the road while Father read Mother's message. The stranger introduced himself. "Sasha is my name, but I'm called Shloime in Yiddish. You are the link between us and the ghetto."

"I don't know what you mean by that", I shot back." Father motioned to him not to talk about it. The subject was changed. Two more Koydanovers joined us, and they all knew my name. They smiled and chatted casually about my school encounter which I'd forgotten. They asked if my sister was working on that school idea.

"They talked about it; that's about all they ever do, I said.

"It's not easy to start a school but don't worry, we'll find ways," Sasha said.

Father and Koydanovers discussed something, then they left us alone and went off in different directions, waving good-bye.

Finally Father explained: "We met last night- a group including the Koydanovers- and decided to return to the ghetto, directly to the synagogue."

"Why there?" I asked. "Are they going to pray? We need a lot of praying."

"But that is not the reason that we're gathering there. It is the only place available. Every house is filled to capacity since they liquidated the small towns and the inhabitants to the ghetto. Every bit of space is occupied. So you see I, too, decided to leave. The Christian family assured me that the rest of my earnings would be in good hands."

"`Come any time with your children and you can pick it up in the same way you did previously.'"

"I did, however take with me, as much as I could carry. Remember Getzl's mill?" He smiled. "I'll tell you Yakov what you must do. I'll rest here a while, you rush home and let them know that I'm on the way so they won't worry."

I rushed into the house. I assured them that Father was all right and carrying a heavy rucksack filled with food.

CHAPTER 9 -JANUARY 1 4, 1 9 4 2 :

Mother became ill, she complained about pain in her stomach. She was also feverish; **Bobie** said so. She could tell by touching the patient's forehead with her lips.

Bobie waited on Mother, putting cold compresses on her head. She also concocted some grass `remedy', made from her store of colored grasses and dried flowers. She mixed all kinds of drinks until she found the one that was right for Mother. Mother's fever dropped, but her stomach pains did not disappear. Sarah had no choice but to assume responsibility for the household. Everyone was in her way. She repeatedly ordered me around, screaming; "do this, do that." She cursed me, and called me all sorts of names.

I laughed it off. This made her angry once that she went after me with a broom. The two younger siblings were by my side, and ran with me. She finally caught up with us. She was particularly annoyed with Itzkhok because he cried non-stop.

"He is driving me crazy," she kept on repeating. **Bobie** tried to curtail Sarah's outburst. Mother somehow rose from her bed and calmed us all. All three of us entered the house. Sarah was on her knees hiding her head in Mother's lap. They were both near tears. Mother motioned to us to come closer. We all dropped to our knees around Mother and her presence comforted us. Sarah stroked us and apologized for her behavior.

"You don't have to feel sorry", I said. It was fun seeing you so angry. I enjoyed it very much. "Should I make you angry more often?"

Bobie interrupted: "We are out of wood. We must go to the cemetery for twigs." Sarah and I made ready. We took some rope and a knife and went on our way. We snuck out of the ghetto and in a very short time we were at the cemetery. I noticed that Sarah was not looking for branches. She was walking between the head-stones, reading the names of the deceased.

"Come help me find our grandfather's grave." We walked among the headstones and finally found it. It was inscribed: **Reb** Gershon the son of Yakov died on such and such a date.

I asked: "Why is my name on it?"

Sara explained: "Most probably this was your great grand-father's name. When you were born, they named you after him so that he should rest in peace."

"Why do you want to see **Zeyde's** grave?" I asked her. She did not answer me, but placed both her hands on the marker and closed her eyes in prayer. I, too, approached the stone. She put her arm around me and said:

"Do you remember what **Bobie** said?"

"No what?"

"When you and father went to Wolozin to get me, while Mother was on the lookout for us, **Bobie** went to the cemetery to pray at **Zeyde's** grave. She prayed for our safe return. And you see, all three of us came home unharmed -except for our aching feet."

"Let's both pray for mother's good health. We'll ask our **Zeyde** to plead with our God in heaven to ease Mother's pain. We'll tell him how much we need Mother, and pray that she remain alive to take care of us, because we'd be lost without her."

She continued: "Please **Zeyde**, you pray for us. Maybe God will not listen to us, because we are sinners. But for a soul so pure as yours in His Kingdom, He will grant your wish."

"I wish I could do what you do", I said, but I don't know what to say to **Zeyde**, except to repeat a story I know about him." She paid no attention to what I was saying, but she held me close. She wiped her tears and sobbed while she looked into my eyes.

"Tell me a story about **Zeyde**", she said. I had never seen her cry so hysterically.

"I didn't think I was good for much. After all, you're always nagging me." But I repeated a story I'd heard about **Zeyde**.

"Oh I feel so much better now", she said. "I only hope God listened to my prayers, and will keep Mother with us. She worries me; her health is deteriorating rapidly. It's too much for her to bear. Don't you ever aggravate her, you hear? Ever! And now we'll say **kadish**. Repeat after me."

I did what she asked. I was afraid not to. We started to pick up some twigs. I asked: "How do you know the **kadish** by heart? A boy should know that, not a girl. But I don't care, as long as mother will be all right."

"Yes, she will be all right," she kept repeating. We tied our bundles of scraps of wood and twigs carefully. At the edge of the cemetery she said:

"Let's wait until it's darker, then we'll sneak back into the ghetto. Meanwhile, tell me another story about **Zeyde**."

"You know **Zeyde** was a member of the burial society. It was pretty funny."

"Yes, I knew that," she said. "What's funny about that?

"I didn't really know what he did there. I was not aware of what had to be prepared, and I did not care. I only wanted to know if anybody died."

"What's so comical about knowing who died?"

"Oh it was a lot of fun."

"Are you kidding?"

"No, it really was. After they came back from the cemetery, all the men had a party. The Burial Society had a variety of cakes and cookies, whiskey herring, white bread and sausage, and **Zeyde** never failed to take me along. I ate a lot of the goodies and sometimes **Zeyde** gave me a little whiskey and I started coughing. I didn't like its bitter taste. I didn't know why the adults enjoyed such strong stuff. They got drunk, laughed, and whirled me around. Grandfather was the only one who took his grandson along, so they played with me. Don't you think it was fun eating all those cakes? But I got to eat so well only because some one died. Isn't that funny? It seems to me you don't like this story. I don't care whether you do or don't, but I had a great time with **Zeyde** and I miss him. He would tell me that anybody he buries is sent off to Paradise where they live forever in splendor. So why shouldn't he go there too?"

Sara finally managed to smile. "Let's go; we have to rush home."

She adjusted the packets on our backs. We soon reached home. The door was wide open for us. **Bobie** looked at the bundles of twigs and scraps of wood and nodded in recognition of a job well done. I prepared a special drink for Mother. While she was enjoying her concoction, Sarah told her my story about **Zeyde**. She listened and smiled.

"What does **Zeyde** have to do with gathering twigs?" asked Mother.

"Mama", I interjected, "don't you think it's funny? You know, I loved my **Zeyde**; he taught me many things. Do you see that clock on the wall with the two weights suspended on long golden chains? He taught me how to fix it when it broke down. When any one wanted to know the correct time, they would come to us and when he sent me on errands, he always paid me, especially when I shined those weights." They both listened to my outburst with smiles.

"Yes, Yakov, it's a funny story."

Then Sarah told her the connection between the twigs and **Zeyde**. "I'll tell you children, I feel much better. Your praying and **Bobie's** drink worked, both of them." **Bobie** smiled when I spoke of **Zeyde**.

Not a day passed without atrocities. Three hundred young men were seized for work in some town. The police came for my Father. Since he was not home, they took me instead. The whole family cried to convince them that I was a small boy, and I'd die in transit.

"Take me instead" Mother insisted. The policeman said he couldn't leave without some one because if the Germans took the matter in their own hands, blood would flow in the ghetto streets. That had been their threat.

"You must believe me", the policeman said. "I hate to do this. Stop pleading, prepare warm clothes and some food for this kid or he'll be left behind and shot by the Germans. Hurry, and prepare what's necessary. I'll wait right here. You have 10 minutes. Otherwise, he goes the way he is."

Mother and Sarah packed some things for me as best they could, while the policeman kept looking at his watch. In due time, I was pushed out of the door, and followed by Mother and Sarah, I lined up with the older stronger and taller people. It really made me feel good to be among them. Mother continued to plead, while Sarah held on to me. She kept talking without stopping.

"Nothing will happen to you. This will pass; you'll see. The Germans will be destroyed and nothing will happen to you. I just know it".

"Why do you keep saying that?"

"I'll tell you why. As soon as you are in a dangerous situation you'll find a way to handle it. Your instinct for self preservation will tell you when to run and how to survive."

"My instinct? What's an instinct? Is it a person? How does he look? Is he a Partisan? Is it a woman? What should I tell him or her? Is it a ghost, is it like the Messiah? How will I know it, Sarah?"

"Every living thing has an instinct, every animal has it. You remember how your **Betar** leader caught a rabbit?"

"Yes, of course, with a bow and arrow, and we enjoyed eating it, so where was the instinct?"

"You see, the rabbit didn't just sit there and wait to be picked up by your leader; he ran. He ran because he sensed danger approaching. That's instinct."

Mother was beaten and shaken. "Oh my Yankele, oh my child. I don't know what to do."

"Please Mama, don't cry. When I'll sense danger, I'll run. My instinct will warn me, do you hear? I'll jump out of the column and run. In **Betar** they taught me how."

"And how is that?"

"In zig-zag. When they start shooting, I'll be deep in the woods and I'll find my way home. So don't worry. I'm a big boy now. You see, they think of me as an adult,

that's why I'm here. So let me go. And I'll tell you the truth, I don't mind leaving; I must start to make my own decisions."

It seemed that out of nowhere my **Bobie** appeared. Without much ado, she grabbed my hand and pulled me out of the line. At the same time she said: "They did not call his name, so he can get out. But he had better run fast. Yakov, Sarah and I will be right behind you." My aunt Rokhl also participated in my rescue.

Although **Bobie** often looked angry, I never really saw her cry before. Now a few teardrops fell from her wrinkled face.

CHAPTER 10 - MARCH 26, 1942:

Sarah begged father not to go at this time. More and more of our people were being taken away. The ghetto was gradually being liquidated. Sarah became very restless, her mind was occupied with thoughts of how to save ourselves and where to hide the diary. By the time April came, it was obvious that drastic measures would have to be taken.. We all felt it. One day Father unexpectedly came home from the village. We all jumped on him.

"What happened? Are you all right? How did you carry such a heavy load? Why didn't you wait until Friday? Are the Koydanovers all right?"

Bobie interrupted: "Oh, leave him alone all of you, can't you see how exhausted he is? Let him take a rest now." She chased us away.

Mother embraced him tenderly as they settled in each others arms. It was always a very pleasant treat for us to be together.

Father explained, "I returned unexpectedly because the peasants were panicking. The Germans rounded them up in the village square, lashed some of them, threatened to hang them and burn their homes if they hid Jews. They posted warnings and dire threats. I felt very uneasy, and decided to leave. We'll wait until the situation settles down, then we'll plan what steps to take."

It was great having Father around the house. He instilled in us a sense of security. He would busy himself with mending our shoes. We all ate and played together, and whenever he had to leave, we all felt sad. Father devised a plan. He would go to the village of Mikolifsh, move about and if matters got out of hand, he'd find his way home. Sarah wanted to know how we would be able to locate him. He described the place where he would be working. Then he prepared to leave again. All of us pleaded with him not to go.

"We are running out of food", he said. "I'll see you again on Friday and we'll have lots of fun. I know a farmer who owns bee hives. I'll be working there. This time I'll bring home honey and maybe chicken, among the other things, so please let me go."

Mother always wept when father left. He was visiting other villages and changed his work plans so often that we had a difficult time locating him. However, we found him somehow. Sarah was very adept at that. But one day we lost our way and walked around in circles.

"Let's rest behind this barn and decide what to do", Sara suggested. It was peaceful there. The cows, pigs, chickens and sheep did their utmost to make us feel their presence. We were calm and we felt warm huddled together. But suddenly Sarah's mood changed from pleasant to sad.

"I hope Father is in this village", she said. Yes, he must be here. This is Mekulitz isn't it"?

I assured her it was. Father had repeated the name of the place many times.

"Oh we'll find him," she added without smiling.

"I like to see you smile", I pointed out. "It makes me happy. I sometimes think you are a worrisome brat who likes to push me around. But you are an entirely different person when you are no longer in the ghetto. Do you remember the time in the cemetery, when I told you the story about our **Zeyde**? We really laughed even when we fought, because we understood each other. When you smiled, I knew you were the landscape or the animals in the area. Do you remember the fire in the ghetto when the flames highlighted your face? You looked beautiful."

"Oh don't be silly", she snapped. "The glow makes everybody look good".

"But there is no fire here and you are still beautiful".

"Oh come on now...it's the wind blowing our way. It makes your cheeks rosy. Oh there is a pool of water where the animals drink, let's see your reflection there. Come, come look into it. See how it mirrors your face. You really think I'm beautiful huh?"

"Of course you are. Your eyes are like Khane's- Getzl's daughter, they're blue. Remember you told her she's a beautiful young lady? You, too, have blond like hers. I don't know if Khane is intelligent, but you are certainly very bright. That's why I enjoy your company. I feel safe, proud and giddy. I love walking with you through the villages, crossing the waters and bridges where it's dangerous."

She rested her head on my shoulder, and in a voice quietly penetrating said: "But at some time we may be forced to separate. We must be prepared for such an eventuality."

"What do we then?"

"Listen carefully. We must pray to God, and believe in him. Never lose hope. When you despair, think. Think how beautiful Khane was, remember how we laughed, recall my face the way you described it...think about your little brother and sister, how much they adore you, about your mother and father, their love and their devotion for all of us, and **Bobie** when she laughs, her innocent smile and her wrinkled old face and **Zeyde** about how he took you to the parties at the cemetery. I think of your stories and I beam with delight. The Germans deprived us of much, but they will never be able to take away from you your wonderful memories. So remember, please remember that."

Sarah abruptly raised her head and we were both surprised. An elderly lady with gray hair, a wrinkled face and a pleasant smile was standing close to us.

"Please don't be afraid. I'll not harm, you. I just want to tell you where you can find your father."

She gently touched our hands. The old lady motioned. "Come in, come into the barn, you are safe here. I'm watching your father. He changes places so often, and I can understand why.

"Who are you"? Sara interrupted.

"Oh I'm an old farm woman who feels for your people".

"You are an angel sent by God. We are lost and we can't find our father".

The old lady crossed herself and said: "Jesus Christ, I'm not an angel, I have lived here for many years. I don't like what I see and what I hear is happening to your people. I just try to help whenever I can. You wait right here, while I tell your father that you are on my farm. It is better that you remain here. I am not sure if the police are close by. They were in the village yesterday."

Sarah watched the direction in which she was heading. "In the event she is lying, we'll climb up on the stacks of hay and hide."

But the lady was truly an angel. She came rushing in and said:

"Your father is all right. I assured him that you were here and safe, and told him not to worry. We'll wait until it gets dark, then I'll take you to him. In the meantime, I'll prepare some food for you. My neighbors are nosy and I don't want them to see you. Otherwise, I would invite you into my house and introduce you to my cat. He follows me wherever I go. He's very smart indeed. Oh here he is"!

She left, followed by her cat. In due time, this merciful soul arrived with food neatly packed and offered some to us. She was visibly moved when we ate and she assured us that we were welcome in her home. Sara chatted with her. The hay made me drowsy and I fell asleep. A tapping on my back woke me. Sarah and our wonderful hostess were tearfully holding hands. It was apparent that they became good friends.

But father could not wait. He rushed in to see us. Apologizing to the gracious woman, he said: "I could not wait another minute. Everyone is so precious to us. I'm glad you came, children. We heard rumors that the ghetto is going to be liquidated in the next few days and we must make decisions. We have to prepare for any eventuality. We are going home as soon as it's dark".

The lady suggested: "let your children stay here with me and you go on ahead. They are safe here. Do what you must without further ado."

I took the woman's hand and said: "I love animals and I know how to take care of them. I could help in many ways, please let me stay with you, please."

She replied: "My son and his family are in Church. When they return, I'll discuss it with them."

Father and Sarah were surprised by my sudden decision and were visibly moved by it. Father said; "Yes, but meanwhile, we must go home and do a lot of thinking."

He hugged and kissed us and left in a hurry. His behavior greatly worried Sarah. She predicted that something terrible was going to happen to us."

"I never saw Father so forlorn and scared" she added.

The old lady, with Sarah and me at her side, watched with us until Father turned into the farmer's lane. "Don't worry children," she reassured us. "We have a God and we must believe in Him. No one knows what tomorrow will bring; we must live one day at a time. Today those beasts brutalize the Jews...tomorrow they'll attack us. They act as if everything belongs to them. They seize whatever they want- horses, cows, pigs, chickens. They are looters."

"It always smells good here. Let's all sit down with our hands entwined." We sat close to her while she spoke.

"Our Priest says: There is a heaven and a hell and there is also God, who is the master over everything and everybody. Although you are His chosen people, He did not bestow upon you a taste of heaven. He sure gave you and continues to plague you with plenty of hell".

Sarah glanced at me and I looked at her not knowing what the old lady was up to. But she just held our hands and caressed them. She finally stopped talking and paused a while. Finally, she threw up her hands and said:

"I feel your anxiety through your veins, the roar of your blood rushing through you. In the pounding of your pulse I hear your screaming. I hear hell."

She released my hand, and with both of hers touched Sarah's face tenderly. She looked into her eyes and said: "I also feel heaven". How is it possible? Heaven and Hell, at the same time? I don't understand it, I did not engage in this kind of activity for over half a century. It's frightening, please my child, tell me what is it that you're doing? You called me an angel."

She dropped to her knees, crossed herself and added: "My child, you are the angel!...please help me solve the riddles, I beg you."

Sara's chin shook and she was on the verge of crying. She began to tremble. The old woman rested her head on Sara's shoulder and in a tremulous voice, Sarah divulged her secret.

"I'm writing a diary. I enter everything I see and feel and when I do that, I hear the birds singing and see the trees swaying. I watch the sun and moon rise and set and then I speak to God and I tell him how much I admire His creation. I also argue with Him, ask questions and demand answers; and when I do all this, I feel quite near to Him. I feel that I'm in heaven. At times, I fall asleep with my pen in hand, and when I wake, I see Hell again."

"I want to see your diary. I want to read it."

"You can't; it's written in Yiddish."

"Then let me feel it, touch it, caress it. I want to rest my head on it. I'll bring it to my Church and place it on the altar. I will tell the congregation that I spoke with an angel; I will tell the Priest of my experience. Please my child, let me have it. Please, yes? Of course I'll return it."

Sarah looked at me in bewilderment and smiling tearfully, she asked: "Will you? Will you cherish it? Will you hide it? Will you give it back to me whenever I ask for it?"

"Certainly, my child. I will, you know I will."

Sarah composed herself , and looked around in bewilderment. "Is it possible? My beloved diary will finally find a safe home? Or am I just dreaming?"

"No my child, you're definitely not dreaming. God the Almighty, the compassionate, the merciful, heard your prayers, saw your tears and directed you to this barn. He also led Mother Mary to another barn where she gave birth to Jesus who was the Son of God."

Sara wanted to discuss the role of Jesus. They engaged in a lengthy dialog. It was boring to me and I casually looked around the barn. In a corner covered with hay, I found eggs. I broke a few and gulped them down. A little further, on I came across vodka bottles with a few drops in them. I went through those too. Left over food was strewn about and I helped myself to that. I was having a good time. I found more bottles with some liquor in them and I drained them of their contents. Then I began to see in my mind's eye my **Zeyde** stuffing cakes and cookies and herring into my mouth. I envisioned the entire Burial Society carrying me on their shoulders, dancing and singing. With my eyes half closed, I noticed Sarah and the lady standing close to me and smiling and gently kicking me. They finally succeeded in getting me on my feet but not for long. I protested vigorously and said: "I'm having a good time with my **Zeyde**. Let's all dance." And then I dozed off again.

I probably had a good nap. When I woke, I realized that the old lady was caressing my hands. Sarah was sitting next to me, trying desperately to keep from laughing. Seemingly out of nowhere, Father appeared. Seeing me lying in the hay amid empty bottles of vodka, he started to laugh. I don't know how much liquor I drank, but I certainly had a good time and a restful nap. I definitely didn't mind all of them enjoying themselves on my account. I jumped up and hugged father. We were all happy see him. Smilingly I pointed to those empty bottles, and the sight of it made him giggle. The old lady ambivalently and with some hesitancy started to read my hand, and then the hilarity stopped.

"Young man", she admonished, "there are lots of difficult times ahead for you. I can't give you the details, but your destiny is to survive. It is just very confusing to me, but God the Merciful will always be at your side to guide and protect you. You'll be very lonely when this war is over. You'll make a long and distant journey in search of happiness. I'm not sure that you will find it. You'll also suffer sickness and face other disappointments, but you'll survive them and in the end, you'll emerge with a few scars, but they too will eventually heal."

She continued: "My name is Danchika. I recognized your father, but he did not remember me. I changed a great deal, you know."

Father almost shouted: "Oh my God, you really have changed." They reminisced about the "good old days." Then she said: "How are you David? I hated to leave my old house. The Germans gave me another one out of the ghetto. I just could not live in it, so I went to the farmer's. I knew once I kept busy it would be all right. It's been so nice to see all of you. I'll hide Sarah's diary" she continued.

That caught Father by surprise. "How do you know about her diary?"

Sarah said: "Don't worry Papa; I'll explain."

"My children, we must go home right now. The ghetto is being liquidated- the date is set for tomorrow. We'll stop over in Ivienietz on the way to Dworetz. It's a long hard way, you know, we must pack and be ready. It makes no sense to take my earnings. We will not be able to carry them in any event. Transportation is being provided for the children only."

Sarah asked; "How do you know all this?"

"The surrounding villages were notified to prepare their horses and buggies and head for the ghetto. From all villages, the peasants are preparing for the journey. For their work, they'll be rewarded with Jewish property left behind. From all directions, villagers are heading for the ghetto. The peasant I worked for did not join these villagers. The farmer assured me that I could pick up my earnings at any time and told me that his door was always open for me. We hugged and parted in friendship. Children, we must rush home and find out what's happening there, and as soon as we're able, we'll bring the diary here for safe keeping".

It seemed to me that father did not trust this old lady. It was difficult for Sarah to part with her new found friend. They hugged tearfully and she reassured Sarah of her honesty. She embraced me and said: "Don't forget what I told you, you little drunkard." Carefully, she opened the barn door and said: "Let me go out first and see if everything is all right."

Father assured her that he knew the area well. She handed us the neatly wrapped package of food, crossed herself in prayer, opened the door and we left. Sarah did not waste much time. She wanted to know who the old lady Dantshicka was.

Father began: "Dantshicka was a good friend of **Bobie's**. She taught **Bobie** how to apply healing cups, how to extract juices from different grasses, which leafs are good for which ailments, and **Bobie** was her best student. **Bobie** used to say Dantsha has unique powers, but I never believed in these myths. She would look at your hand and predict your future, but she stopped doing that a long time ago."

" Why? asked Sarah.

" She would say that in life one has to accept the good and the bad, but it seemed to her that everyone wanted to hear only the good predictions. Apparently she was a very honest woman, and very religious. She spends most of her time in Church and she helps people. She would talk with **Bobie**, mostly in Yiddish, of course, but we youngsters tried to avoid her. We called her " the witch". She alluded to her children, but she never married as far as I can remember. She seldom called me by my name; it was always, " my child." Why are you bothering me with all of this? We have more serious things to talk about than the old lady."

"Listen Papa, Dantshika read my hand. First she just held it, then she started to caress, and then she read it. She did the same thing to Yakov." Sarah continued: "I had a strange feeling, I started to tremble. I felt her powers, and cried in her embrace."

" What the hell did she tell you that made you quake?

Sarah then began to tell father everything that transpired.

"Please, forget about all of this, he said. "Nobody ever believed a word she said." He turned to me: "Did you, too, feel the same powers? Did you quiver huh?"

I answered: "I felt no powers; I remained calm. Now, let's stop all this nonsense. I'm getting hungry."

"He is right. We are not far from home, just wait a few more minutes and we'll all eat together", Father promised.

I was anxious to find out what the package contained. My curiosity bothered me all the way home. But when I arrived, the house was in disarray, Mother looked at

us confusedly. The younger two children were at her side, crying. **Bobie** was trying to pack and did not seem to know what to do first.

Mother told us that the ghetto was to be liquidated. They had given us 24 hours to be prepared. All able bodied, men and women had to be ready. The children, they said, would have transportation and only the old and the sick would remain. If anyone who was not accounted for, was found in the house, he or she would be summarily shot. Our destination would be Dworetz with a stop-over in Ivienietz.

It became chaotic; the screaming and running created confusion. Father and mother huddled in panic. For a while, Sarah did not know what to do. She stood there motionless and looked at us. Then she seized my hand and pleaded.

"Come with me, now you listen to me. If you behave like a smart alec, we'll all be in trouble. The first thing we must do is to get the knapsack. Go into the cellar and bring up those potato sacks, and some potatoes, and if there is some rope lying around, bring that along too. Right now, ask no questions. Start moving."

I was afraid to say anything. I brought up the sacks and potatoes but no rope.

Sarah continued to issue her commands. "Get the sheets and cut them in strips, here is the scissors."

I started to cut, but she did not like it.

"Give it to me quickly. Let's rip it. Where are the potatoes?"

"Are you going to cook them?" I wanted to know.

"No silly. Just do what I tell you, that's all."

"Yes captain", I snapped back.

She grabbed two potatoes. "Place one in each corner of the sack, tie up the corners with the strips, and one knapsack is ready. We need three more."

We soon had four ready-made knapsacks, and we congratulated each other and smiled. Mother disliked our tearing her sheets; after all, we had worked so hard to get them.

"Now go outside," Sarah urged. "Find out what's happening and where Dworetz is located."

"I can't read the map; I have a headache", I complained.

"I'm not surprised", Sarah commented, "after drinking so much vodka, as you did."

"I want to eat what Dantshka gave us" , I said.

In her demanding manner she snapped, "You'd better start moving now..."

"I'm going, I'm going." I asked people on the street, I inquired of neighbor's. No one knew where Dworetz was located. I finally stopped a Jewish policeman. "80 kilometers", he replied curtly.

I rushed back.

"What took you so long?", Sara demanded.

"80 kilometers", I shot back. "What else do you want me to do, Captain?"

Sarah smiled, but she continued to order. "Whatever Mother and **Bobie** did, has to be done over. Here, put those things in this sack and that in the other one." She pushed some things around and threw others out.

One knapsack was ready, she soon announced. In due time we had four completed knapsacks. Once in a while she would give me a kiss and a long hug. She brought calmness to the confused situation. I just wanted to be around her, and do whatever she asked.

"You know Sara, if we joined the partisans, you would become an officer immediately and you would lead us all into battle. We'd fight those Germans, we'd derail their trains, and burn their trucks."

"How is your headache?"

"Let's drop all this and go to Dantsira's."

"Are you still drunk?"

"She promised to help us", I said.

"Let's finish our preparations" Sarah suggested.

"They'll do to us what they did to the Koydanovers."

Sara screamed: "You had better stop talking like that."

Mother interceded. "Are you two starting again?"

"Leave them alone. Let them talk, even scream" Father advised.

"Everything went smoothly until he started to talk", Sarah explained. "Now listen you know-it-all, you promised to do everything I asked and you wanted to be

my soldier. What kind of a soldier would you be? Ha, any military man who defies an order from an officer would be shot. You just think about it: I'm your superior now."

"I don't want you to shoot me, so of course I'll obey."

"These are things that all of us will wear. Place one dress on top of another one. Pairs of pants on top of others, and so on. Come, follow me. We will carry those knapsacks on our backs, as well the food. Each of us will have a separate bag. How does it look to you, soldier?"

We embraced. Not a word was uttered and we both sat down. Mother, Father, **Bobie** and our two younger siblings walked over to us and sat at our sides.

Mother reasoned: "You see? If they wanted to kill us, they would have done so, as they did in Koydanov. Why should they drag us 80 kilometers? Obviously, they need us over there and if that's the case, why should they kill us? Doesn't that make sense?"

Father said: "Going to the villages today would create a problem and place us in danger. The peasants -and even the farmers we worked for- weren't completely on our side, especially after the warnings they received from the German authorities. The walls are plastered with their warnings."

I said: "I must tell you, I still have a headache, and I must lie down."

"What's wrong with him?" Mother wanted to know.

Bobie said: "Let me see", and touched my head.

"I'll tell you what's wrong with him," volunteered Father. "He drank too much vodka today."

I took my little brother, and sister, with me and said: "I'll tell you the story."

But it was Father and Sarah who told them how I got drunk. I heard them giggle as I was closing my eyes. With my two younger siblings at my side, I soon fell asleep.

Early in the morning, I was awakened by our next door neighbors. They had 5 daughters. One, about my age, was named Fania. She was a slim girl with a rather high pitched voice. When Fania argued with her sisters, she could wake up the entire **shtetl**. Since everybody was still sleeping, I indulged myself in thinking about Fania. One summer day, a group of us youngsters decided to sneak out of the ghetto and go into the woods to pick berries or whatever we could find that was edible. Fania was there with us. We all had a wonderful time. Every one, including Fania, filled their baskets. I saw a bunch of mushrooms nearby and then another one. I picked them until my basket was overflowing. When I realized that I was alone, I was scared; I could not find my way out of the woods. Hearing the others laughing and cavorting, I

tried to follow their voices. But they soon became indistinct. I realized that I was lost. It was getting dark, and I became panicky. I tried to find the sunset, but I failed. In **Betar**, they had taught us how to find our way if we ever got lost in the woods. I was probably looking in the wrong direction. Suddenly, I heard Fania's high-pitched voice again. I followed her voice, screaming at top of my lungs: "Fania, Fania, wait for me! Where are you? Angel where are you?"

In all this excitement, I kept losing my mushrooms. I did not know what to do first, so I attempted to do both. Fania's voice kept fading, and I found myself at the edge of the woods. I looked around in despair, wondering what to do, which way to turn. It was getting darker all the time. But God was with me. I saw the sunset! This was surely the most beautiful sight I had ever seen. I sat down and wept for joy. The lectures in **Betar** had proved useful. I gathered up my scattered mushrooms and continued to gaze at the setting sun, which guided me home. The first person I saw when I entered the ghetto was Fania. We embraced and kissed- my first kiss from a girl.

"Let's rush home" I said. "Everybody is worrying about us."

Fania helped me carry the overstuffed basket. "Oh my God, where did you find those beautiful mushrooms?" she wanted to know.

"Please take some", I said. She took a handful. "You know Fania", I continued, "I never liked your high voice, but today it was the most beautiful sound I've ever heard." We both smiled when we entered my house.

Before we left the ghetto we had yet another trauma. On the morning of April 2nd, we heard shouting. As it got louder and more intense, and was followed by screaming, we got increasingly frightened. My father went outside to see what was going on, and we followed him. It did not take him long to realize we were in danger. We were rushed back into the house. But when we were inside, we realized that Sarah was missing. Father ran outside to fetch her, and I followed him.

Sarah stood outside, trying to scream, but she couldn't. Instead, she stood there whispering: "Stop it, stop it." She was unsteady; it looked like she would fall. Father picked her up, and carried her into the house. Once we were inside, **Bobie** decided Sarah had fainted, and would recover if we just left her alone.

The S.S. troops accompanied by Lithuanian, Ukrainian, and local bandits had stormed our town before. This time their shooting spree began early in the morning. We thought perhaps a fight had broken out between the partisans and the local police. My father went outdoors once more to find out what was happening. I followed behind him.

The word spread like wild-fire: this time they want gold. The Jewish police were beaten and humiliated. As it was, they could do nothing. They rushed from house to

house explaining the situation. When he realized what was happening, my father grabbed my arm and we rushed back home.

Back home, we found Sarah lying in bed. **Bobie** held her hand up and motioned to us to be quiet: "Sh, sh, she must rest. Get out, get out." Sarah must have sensed our presence because she stretched out her arm and with shaking lips said to Father: "We must go to Dantchika." Father nodded his head and said: "We will, we will." She said nothing more but I thought I detected a wink when her eyes met mine. She smiled at **Bobie** and kissed Mother's hand.

Mere-Liebe looked at Sarah and decided I was to blame. "So, Sarah is sick? She won't write any more, huh? You probably fought with her again, is that it? She would let ME read her diary, no problem." She grabbed Itsinke's hand. Before they left the room, he came over and gave me a kick with his little foot.

When we were out of Sarah's hearing, Father said: "We must have the gold ready for them. As soon as they enter the house, I'll give them what we have. I don't want Sarah to know what is happening." He turned to Mother and said:

"Twenty five years ago, I put this ring on your finger and said: "With this ring, you are hereby sanctified to me.." That was the most precious moment of my life. The bandits in black may rob us of whatever they can; it looks like no one will stop them. But they can not touch my love for you. I'm taking this ring off your finger now, but I say again: "You are sanctified to me. I reaffirm my love and devotion and respect for you."

Mother could not say a word. She was too choked with tears.

Bobie took my hand in one of hers and my other two siblings in her other hand. "Let's spread our hands", she said. We'll circle around them seven times." She sang a song I did not know and seemed to be praying as we circled around them.

We were not aware of the ghetto police who stood at our door. They stood there listening and watching; they didn't want to interrupt us. They took off their police caps and their arm bands and put on their **yarmulkes**. Then they walked up to us and said: "Yes, we heard it. We witnessed the re-marriage of this couple." And they cried too. They took the two wedding bands and a few other pieces of gold jewelry, apologized, and left.

The first day of Passover Sarah felt a little better. She walked around a little and was in and out of bed.

Liotte Eisenbad, father of our **shtetl**, beloved by every one and a good friend of my **Zeyde** was at our door. He was pale and shaking; his beard was bloody and it was an effort for him to walk.

"Let me sit down, Shoshke", he said to my mother. **Bobie** walked over to him.

"What's happened to you? When did it happen? If my Gershon were alive now, he would faint just looking at you. Let me give you something for your wounds. Ay, it's awful! Who beat you up like this? May their hands be chopped off."

Bobie noticed Sarah walking out of her room and she ordered her back to bed. Still a bit dazed, Sarah returned to bed.

"I don't want her to see you so beat up", Bobie told Liotte. "Come make yourself comfortable and stay awhile.

But Liotte had come on a mission. He said: "The Gestapo police from Ivenitz are demanding gold from the ghetto Jews. If we don't deliver gold, they say, "blood will run in the streets." We sent the Jewish police from house to house but they didn't collect much gold. So we- the **Judenrat**- got beaten up. I got the first beating. That's why I'm all bloodied. They want more gold. So, what do you say, Rivke-Henye?"

"I have a little ring that Gershon gave me years ago and I have a golden watch on a golden chain. There's a picture of Gershon and me and there I am with the watch."

"Yes, I know you have a gold watch on a chain. That's why I came."

He took from his pocket a few watches and a few chains and told **Bobie** who owned each of them. She looked and listened, but she didn't offer her own.

"They'll kill me if I don't bring them all the gold in the ghetto", Liotte said. But **Bobie** still didn't offer up her watch.

"I have a few gold coins I can give you. The watch isn't worth anything; it no longer runs. What good is a watch that no longer runs?"

"I'll take your coins", Liotte said. "As for the watch, I'll tell them it's a useless watch because it no longer runs. And as for the chain, it may be of no use without a watch. I give you my word: If they won't take the watch, I'll personally return it to you."

Bobie did give him the watch- eventually. She shook as she held onto the chain for the last time. Her whole face was contorted as she muttered: "The thieves, the robbers... When will it end, oh God? Let there be an end to it.."

On May 16, 1942 our ghetto was liquidated and moved eastward. The elderly and sick were left behind. Later in the month, they were taken to the Shimkintzer forest and murdered. My **Bobie** was among them.

The day we were to leave the **shtetl**, I tried take my mind off our awful situation, but I couldn't. The noise in the street became increasingly louder. One of my younger siblings rested his head on my body, while the other held my hand. Sara and Mother and Papa were around us. It seemed as if they were trying to protect us. Bobie was quietly walking around, on guard, lest any harm come to us. It felt satisfying to be surrounded by family and in such restful surroundings, but that too was short-lived. Soon Father was on his feet. He apologized for sleeping late.

"We must rise now", he said. We all jumped to our feet. It was early morning and Father suggested we wash and eat breakfast. Mother busied herself while Sarah stepped out of the house to see what was happening in the ghetto. She was about half way out, when she turned back, and seized my arm.

"Come, come with me."

"I'm not going; I want to eat first" I protested, thinking about the package Dantchika had prepared for us. I did not move. Sarah left in a hurry. In a short time she came rushing in. Mother wanted to know if there was time for breakfast.

Sarah reported: "There is great deal of commotion out there, but we still have time to eat breakfast. Yakov and I will prepare the knapsacks, while you, Mother and **Bobie**, set the table."

Sarah had a problem with Father. He insisted on taking all of his tools with him. She tried to convince him to take only the essential ones. They argued for a while and finally compromised.

The table looked weird, set as it was with the Sabbath tablecloth, and with candlesticks that had no candles in them. Dantichika's package was prominently displayed. It contained bread, cheese, hard boiled eggs, milk and other nutritious foods that **Bobie** had put away for a special occasion. Mother straightened her amber hair, and smiled. When she smiled, her dimples made even more attractive. Father took his seat at the head of the table. Mother and Bobie were at either side, and then there was all four of us. Mother unwrapped Dantchika's package slowly, while trying to find the appropriate words for the occasion.

"Here is a small bottle of honey, a jar of jam, dried fruit, a piece of cheese and half a loaf of bread. God bless that old lady."

Father was moved, while mother hugged each of us. It was solemn moment. Sarah handed over her diary to **Bobie** who said:

"Sarah darling, I promise I'll watch over your diary and I assure you that there is no reason to worry. If I ever feel that I can't guard and revere it any longer, I will bring it to Dantchika. I'll know where to find her."

The two younger children became restless and I said; "That's enough, let's start eating." The food was delicious. I grabbed the honey, and did not relinquish it easily. In a short time, the delicacies on the table were gone. Father intoned the grace after meals, and we tried on our knapsacks.

Sarah suggested: "Let's walk around in them and see what happens."

My little sister Merre-Liebe, asked: "How about you, **Bobie**? Where is your knapsack? Aren't you going with us?" She walked over to me. "Why isn't **Bobie** going with us?"

Bobie answered: "I'm going to watch the house and pray for your safety. In due time, I'll come to visit you." The two youngsters jumped for joy shouting. "**Bobie** will come to visit us."

Mother had a problem with her knapsack. "I won't be able to carry this thing. How in the world will I be able to walk such a long distance? No, I'll stay right here with **Bobie**." She covered her face with her hands.

I went straight for the honey while the two children preferred the dried fruits.

Father asked us to listen to Mother who wished to say a few words. "This is what I want to say: we are going to leave this house shortly- the home in which your father was born and raised and where you, too, came into this world. I don't know how soon we'll return, but I am sure that we'll have to turn to God in our prayers."

Sarah rose slowly and spoke: "I'm so proud of you, Mother. With all the chaos and fear that surrounds us, with all the confusion in this uncertain time, you brought

shabes into our house. Oh how much I love you, how much I yearn for your happiness."

Father walked toward us: "If I am ever forced to part from you, I'll ask our merciful God to release me from that torture, and take me into his Kingdom, where I'll plead with Him for your safety."

Even the young children spoke: "Don't worry Mama, we'll all help you." Itzik, the youngest, tried to stand, struggled, and finally fell. "You see Mama, it's easy."

Sarah consoled Mama: "Don't worry about anything. We'll manage." She started to take charge. "Yakov, will you try on your knapsack? Wait a while; put on 2 or 3 pairs of pants, and a few shirts and see what happens." It was bulky and heavy, but I was afraid to complain. Sarah realized that it was too much for me, but she let me try it. Then she said, "As for me, first I have to put some of my dresses on top of each other." She did so and then said: "that's fine, I'll take this one."

"Mama, here's a small bag with 2 handles. This is the most valuable one. It contains our best cloths. We must keep it at all costs in the event we have to sell the cloths for food. We'll all change hands." Mother continued to look at the mess around us. Sarah and her commands buoyed our spirits.

"Let's try the knapsacks on again." She adjusted the straps, and pushed the contents around for more balance. "Not bad huh? Now let's step outside and see what's happening. Mama, there is still time. We'll rush over to Aunt Sorke and Rokhl to say good-bye."

Mother pleaded: "Please, please, watch out and come back soon."

Aunt Sorke cried: "Oh my God, we are so happy to see you. Is everybody all right? We are lost, we don't know where to start. As you can see, everything is in turmoil. Please stay for a while longer."

"We must go to see Aunt Rokhl; time is short."

There, too, the situations was chaotic. "We'll see you soon", they said as we left.

"Why do they all cry when they see us? I don't understand", I said when we returned.

Mother said: "I'm happy that there are certain things you don't understand. How is everybody? Is Sorke all right, and Rokhl? And how are the children? Are they still packing?"

She asked many other questions. A great deal of screaming and crying could be heard: "Raus, mach schnell, raus, farfluchte Juden."- Out, make it fast, out, you cursed Jews. The shouting was getting closer. Sarah was the last one to put on her

knapsack. After a hug and a kiss for **Bobie**, we rushed out. We were spared many beatings because we managed to stay a few steps ahead of the Germans. The pushing and insults continued until we lined up with the rest of the Jews. Our people filled the ghetto streets, heading toward Ivienietz. The peasants with their horses and buggies were ready for our children. Here too we were spared severe beatings because we brought our two children a few minutes earlier. Some children were driven out of their homes bereft of almost everything. Some appeared half naked; others were overloaded with heavy bundles packed in a hurry. These children dropped out of line later. They were left behind and eventually shot by the Germans. The long lines were gradually formed into a homogeneous unit, surrounded by the Germans on horses and by the police. The march began. The long hours of walking sapped our strength. More of our people were left behind. The shooting came more frequently and we quickly learned what they wanted. When we finally came to a halt, we rushed over to the children, who seemed be enjoying the ride. We were chased back to the lines and we had an opportunity to eat. Then we returned to the march. We had problems with Mother. Sarah insisted she remove some of her clothes. First one and then another dress; that made her feel a little better. As our bag of food was depleted, we stuffed Mother's dresses into it. Because Sarah had arranged the knapsacks in such a practical way, we were able to stuff clothes into them.

CHAPTER 11

Into the great Polish barracks we were driven,
Each family finding some small spot
To rest its bones

Too weary to keep their eyes open
The children cry and clamor
And refuse to be appeased.

The air is close,
The noise is loud,
The Germans use their guns
To keep everyone from leaving.

Mother and Father come running to us,
Reassuring us many times.

You needn't be afraid, little ones.
Nothing bad will happen to you--
Not that you have done anything evil;
Everyone knows that,
Soon we shall leave this place
And go home together.

We'll run to **Reb** Getzl's riverside
We'll bathe there in the cool water.
We'll jump and dance and sing
And, of course, we'll fish.

Grandma and I will light candles
And dress in our Sabbath best.
We'll visit the study house and return.

We'll eat and drink and ask our Father in Heaven
To protect us from harm and evil.

Sarah, dearest one, my life,
My treasure, purest soul,
Enveloped in charm,

Young and old, rich and poor
Will speak your words and turn your pages
In which you will demand, request and pray,
From the free world seeking justice,
And ask of the indifferent:

"Have you no conscience?"
Our Father in Heaven will heed your lamentations
And will lead us back to our old home.

You, Yankele, my hope, my comfort
And my pride,
You'll pass through fields of green
And forests dense,
Through storm and strife
Through snow and rain.
Dark clouds will spread across the skies
Concealing your long hard road.

Yet the sun in all its brightness
Will dissipate the clouds,
Will shine upon the old house
of worship
You will find your way there,
And your young voice singing
Haneros Halolu and **Ato Berkhartonu**
Will be heard there.

You, my stars four,
Oh, how innocent you are!

Iveniets: Taking Leave of My Little Five Year Old Brother

My youngest brother,
Handsome and bright,
With your eyes of blue
And your beautiful blond locks..
Your trousers patched,
Your tiny shoes shabby
With their faces knotted.

I hold your delicate little hand,
Your words are indistinct and half
spoken,
Your baby voice sounds frightened
And choked with tears.

I lift you up in my outstretched arms,
And feel your little heart
Beating ever so loudly.

I press you to my heart,
Kiss you and caress you and I smile.
Fear not, my little brother,
I'll carry you in my arms
And I'll not abandon you.

A sweet smile covered his face
But soon his worn tears repose on my
cheek,
His trembling little arms are tight around
my throat.

His sharp baby teeth
Bite into my flesh and blood begins
to flow;
His little feet kick
As the Germans tear him from my arms.

My young sister, Merre-Liebe--
A nine-year-old with black eyes
Like cherries,
With long, unruly curly hair
Which falls across her fine-featured face.

Called the prettiest in her class
And excelling in every subject--
Even now I see you clearly,
Running to Father and Mother
And shouting out to me:

"I will not stay here
With all these children!
Take me with you, brother!"
Then, running back to Mother,
Then to Father, and from Sarah to me.

I fell to my knees and clasped you tight:
"Do not weep, pretty little sister.
We'll hide you among us
And shield you from the murderous Germans.
We'll run out the door
Confused, afraid, but all together."
And the first German did not notice her.
But the sadistic second one
Whipped us with his stick,
Tearing our chain apart.

My poor sister, you fell at our feet.
The German dragged you by your lovely curls,
Pushed and slammed you
In among the other children.

I loved you more than myself,
And oh, how I miss you!
Even now I see you flitting,
From Father to Mother, from Sarah to me.

Mother, Father, Sarah and me
The Germans pushed through a narrow door.
Mother--white as a dove,
Her clothes and her face smeared with blood--
Looked towards the heavens
Without words, without tears,
Looked towards the heavens
Open-mouthed
Father and Sarah each held her by an arm
And helped her walk.
I scurried from side to side
As the German louts accompanied us.

I wanted to help but did not know how.
Oh, how that hurts now!

Seven hundred--700 young children,
Pudgy and thin, dark haired and blond,
With pretty little faces,
Clasped each other, hand in little hand.
Tiny infants, unable to walk, or even stand,
Smiling and laughing with so much charm,
Each little one's tongue
Seeking mother's warm breast--
Dotted the cold ground.

You searched for us with your big eyes,
Black, blue and tearful.
You turned your heads to the right and to the
left:
Where is my brother, the strong one?
My sister, the pretty one?
Where are Mother and Father, Grandma and Grandpa?"

I see you even now--
Seven hundred children pure of heart--
From Nalibakh, Derowna, from Slobodka and Valma,
From Rubzewitz, Iveniets, from Khatova and Grani.

Father then their spied his two young ones
And tried to run toward them.
The German blocked his way
And aimed a gun at him.

Go back, or I'll shoot,
"Du Jude verfluchte!"
You damned Jew, he shouted.

Sarah, my sister, pulled Father back
While I seized Mother's arm.
We looked around, her eyes searching,
For she did not grasp what had just happened.

Torn, dispirited, separated and strewn,
With no packs, no sacks, no will to live,
We once again were driven out onto the teeming
road.

Sarah began to wipe away Mother's blood stains
And bind the wounds on her hands and feet.

Father on one side, Sarah on the other,
Led her
Through wood and field, city and village,
Despite storms and frigid snow
"We'll bring our little ones back home."

"Dear heart, be strong!
You are the very beat in my breast,
The air in my lungs
The sun that shines
And warms my soul.
You are the colorful rays that light our way",
Said Father, urging his beloved wife on.

"Mother dear, lovely and devoted," called Sarah.
"You remember how I returned home:
Walked all the way to Wolozin,

Through woods with Partisans entrenched
And roads overrun with Germans.
Our legs were swollen and our bodies weary."

"Quite without fear, without alarm,
With only faith in God we shall do it again.
We shall walk back to Iveniets
And find our little children
And bring them once again to you."

Thus spoke clever Sarah.

Again Father pleaded:
"Show me, my lovely one, that you hear what I say;
Show me your smile, to elate us."

Mother, wearily, opened her eyes,
Caressed his hands and kissed them,
But there was no smile on her face.

"Halt!" came the command.
A mass of people covered the dry sandy roads.
"You must eat something, you must drink.
Take something to revive your soul."
So pleaded Father, through choking tears.

Mother dutifully--tried to eat but could not
swallow.
He stroked her face and lovingly addressed her

"Oh, how lovely you are when you're not weeping,
Your eyes lush as cherries, set like jewels
That brighten and light up your lovely face."

Mother spoke: "I don't have the strength;
And cannot walk any further
My darling, you can see that yourself."

"In my arms I'11 carry you, my treasure,
Until we reach our home, our own.
How beautiful you are!"

Father's love brought her courage
To talk to us softly she began:
"I want to hurry back for my children.
I'll free them from the hands of the murderers.
I'll bite, claw
And spit my blood and tears at them
Let me caress them once more,

Look into their beautiful eyes and kiss them!"

"Grant me my wish to play with them,
Wash their little hands and comb their locks,
Dress them in their tiny trousers, darn their
little socks.
How, oh, how, can I go on living without them?"

"Their grandfather, from his grave, will implore the
heavens
And perhaps, perhaps, he will have his wish granted.
Bring God down on earth, to see what havoc
The gentiles have wreaked."

For He must help me become merciless.
He must help me sever these bonds.
He cannot be blind to our suffering, deaf to our
supplication.
My dear little children, how I long for you both!"

The wind began to whirl the sand
And mix it with our sweat.
The wet dust covered our faces
And our clothes stuck to our skin.

Father wiped Mother's face
To uncover her beauty again.
He kissed and caressed her hands
And smiled towards us.

Sarah began to clean my face
And scratched my skin in so doing.
"I don't want you to do this!"
She just smiled.

"Oh, you've smeared his face with mud
And made him look like a clown," said Mother.
A smile appeared on my mother's face
As she looked at me.

The smile buoyed Sarah's courage
And she continued to besmirch my face,
A kaleidoscope color of sweat and sand
And talked to me the while.

"Let me mar your non-Jewish-looking face
And display my talent for it."

"I wouldn't and couldn't cause you pain;
I don't really wish to dirty your face.
With my scratching; I'm only trying
To massage your cheeks and give expression
To your youthfulness again."

"I wish only to bring a smile to your face.
And with you, we'll all smile and laugh.
Dear little brother
Be prudent and don't complain
Just let's get Mother to smile again."

My mother's joy did not last.
"Macht's schnell, macht's schnell, ihr verfluchten
Juden!"
Hurry up, hurry up, you damned Jews!
Came the Germans' strident command once more.

The dust rose again and obscured the sun.
"God in Heaven, You give us much sand!
But where is even a bit of rain to settle the dust
And quench our thirst?"
So pleaded our neighbor, eyes raised toward the
sky.

"Where are you from, sir?"
"I am rabbi in the town of Derewna,
Neighbor to your **shtetl** Rubzewitz,
And this is my wife, a fine, saintly woman."

"We were both appreciating your talent.

Are you an artist, a writer,
Or perhaps, a comedienne?"

"I am a daughter of the Jewish people,
A pupil at **Beys Yakov**.
I studied our Torah and observed the commandments.
This is my younger brother, Yakov,
And there are my father and mother, walking."

"Excuse me, Rabbi; I must help my father
Prop up our mother," said my sister Sarah.

"Yakov, child, come here to me.
Your sister has been playing with your face
And we all laughed.
Very soon, however, you'll wash
And look like a handsome boy again. And shortly,
You'll pray wearing a **tallis**
And will be called to the **bema** to recite your
Haftorah.
Then all of us will dance at your Bar Mitzvah.
We'll go home again and plant trees
And you'll grow up to be a Jewish soldier. Wait and
see!"

"I want to run into the forest, to become a Partisan,"
Shoot Germans and burn down their houses.
I want to find my young sister and brother
And bring them back to Mother.
I can't carry my rucksack much longer now;
I'll soon have to leave it on the road."

"Don't worry, child, well help you.
I threw mine away a long time ago,
So let me carry yours now."

"Thank you, oh, thank you a thousand times.
The things in the pack are all we own.
They will sustain us."

"Oh, how good it feels--even if only for a few
minutes."
"Now, child, tell your parents
We'll help all of you in any way we can.
God punished my wife a long time ago
And deprived us of children of our own,
Neither a Yankele nor a Sorele,
A Yitskhokl or a Mirele.
But I love all Jews, and of course you among
them."

"What if I ran into the woods right now?"
"No, my child, not now!"
That's my advice. We are surrounded
And they'll shoot you down summarily.
That would be too much for your mother to bear:
She'd fade out along the way, like a candle.'

"No bullet will catch me,
For I'll be running fast, very fast,
And Zig-zagging.
And the thickets
Will block my pursuers."

"In this dense wood I have a friend, a Partisan.
Hershl's his name. He has a gun
And will surely help me.
This is the same route we took to bring Sarah
home.
Here Partisans captured us and many questions were
asked.
Mistaking us for spies, they threatened our lives
And were ready to shoot us.
But God sent us Hershl; and we brought Sarah
safely home."

"Yes, this is the mighty forest
Dense with tall stately pines
Where little birds hop and sing,
Through which rivulets run and fish swim.

The woods are adorned with blossoms of every kind.
Lovely and colorful. Here the earth is carpeted with
grass
And the air is fresh and sweet."

"Oh, Rabbi, what would happen
If I ran right now?
You wouldnít tell Mother, would you?
And if Mother and Father, find out I ran
Please tell them I left to get our little ones
And bring them back."

"I beg you, child, do not go.
You must understand
That when you went for your sister
You were not surrounded by Germans.
But now--now we are prisoners,
With Germans astride horses all around us, and
policemen.
Their guns at the ready to shoot us.
You wouldn't have a chance; you must not risk it."

The rabbi and his wife pleaded with me.
And once again I felt lost
And I wept tearlessly.

The rabbi seized my right hand
To keep me from running;
His wife patted my left one.

"Don't worry, my child, my Jewish child.
In a few hours we'll be in Dworetz.
Then we'll decide what to do.
In the meantime my advice would be
That my wife and I assist your mother
While you three accompany us."

"Permit me, **Reb** Dovid, to help you
While you rest your weary body."
They tossed our rucksacks over their shoulders,

Then the Rabbi and his wife
Ran to me and took mine away.
They carried it between them while I rested my back.

Lovingly they each took Mother by an arm
And led her, like a bride at a wedding.
With brave words, pious and heartfelt
They strove to imbue her with hope.

She responded with tears and smiles
And thanked them effusively.
Although it hardly seemed possible, they succeeded
In regenerating her soul.

Sarah reached into her rucksack,
For food
And turned to the two caring people:
" We'll share whatever we have with you."

The rabbi's wife spoke:
" We cannot accept your food
You have so little for yourselves.
We still have something in our pockets that we can
eat.
That also will suffice to quench our thirst."

Sarah said: " We have little, and you have nothing.
We therefore have much more than you do.
To give when one has, is indeed a very great **mitzvah**.
But to give when one has nothing--
What is the dimension of such a sacrifice?
Please, let us earn a **mitzvah** through you."

" What you have given us is much more than food:
Life and courage are your gifts.
And when courage is gone, all is lost.
Does anyone know what will become of us now?"

Then Mother spoke:

"My dear Rabbi and **Rebetzin**
We won't be permitted to sit here for long,
And extended waiting will not ease our hunger.
If you won't eat, neither will we."
Mother's words persuaded them.

"You may sit here for ten minutes more!"
The Germans began to check the time.
"Aufstehen ! Aufstehen ! Schmutzigen Juden!"
Get up, get up, you dirty Jews!
Their barking resembled those of wild dogs.

Once again, we fastened our rucksacks on our backs
But our way was blocked:
A herd of deer, small and large,
Brown in color, antler-spread,
Jammed the winding road.
The Germans, reluctant to chase them,
Uncertain what to do,
Began to watch the deer
And forgot about us for the moment.
Confused, the deer stood still.

"Help from God in the guise of deer!"
People around us were saying.
But their hope was short lived
For the Germans began shooting at the animals.
Swift and graceful, the deer began
To run from us in fear.

And once again we were abandoned.
The sun will soon set and its colorful rays will desert us
Gradually, it will disappear
Darkness will prevail.
The Germans will then be unable to see,
And when that happens, all of us will have to
Run into the woods. This was the plan

I whispered to the **Rebetzin**, to convince her.
She thought for a while, then included Sarah in the conversation.

"In the dark?" questioned Sarah.
"Have no fear, child.
The stars will light our way
And God in Heaven will protect us."
The **Rebetzin** ran to our other three,
Informed them softly, and the plan
Found favor among them.

But the Germans--those murderers--
Had anticipated such action
And ordered a halt in the dark of night.

The small town of Liuptz crossed our path
And the Nazis forced us
Into the Jewish homes there.

Devastation was all round us
The Jews of Liuptz had long before
Been driven from their houses
The houses had been emptied by looters,
Doors smashed open, **mezuzahs** smashed,
Windows shattered, walls bare,
A shoe, a sock, a picture, a sign
Lay strewn over the broken floor.
Winds were blowing from all sides.
As if trying to cleanse the poisoned air.
And God's creatures, startled, ran from their hiding
places.

The rabbi of Drewna's hands clutched his head:
"Why, this is Liuptz, with its famous **Yeshiva**!
Students came here to study
Our Torah from all over the world."

"Liuptz, the small town, home of the great **Yeshiva**--
This is where I spent my youth,
This is where I found my bride,
Where I was ordained a rabbi."

"The Jews of Liuptz, dear, kind friends,
Generous souls, were always giving.
Although they had precious little for themselves

They did everything they could to make us
comfortable
And fed us all."

"Do you recall, my dearest, how I met you?"
"Of course, How could I ever forget?
You ate in our house every Sabbath."

"**Reb** Zvuln had two sons and five daughters
To have five daughters is no laughing matter,
But he married off all of them," recalled the
Rabbi.
Reuven and Yudi studied at the **yeshiva**.
Gitl was the eldest daughter
And Bayle next.
Twins after them
And Khane was the fifth and youngest.
She beamed like seven suns
And our love began to bloom.
She was eighteen years old
When we were wed.

The entire **Yeshiva** enrollment feasted and sang.
Danced and drank, all rejoiced.
In Derewna I found a post.
Serving the Jewish community."

"My mother's name was Rivka," the **Rebetzin** told
us.
Her soul was pure and her intentions were
honorable.
She died while still quite young;
I was four years old when she left us.
My father grieved and wept for her
And never married again."

"We've told you our story briefly
And there is much more to relate.
They will soon begin to drive us again
And I must now say a few words to my people."

The Rabbi took Sarah and me by our hands.
"Let us rise from the ground,
"Straighten our bodies and raise our heads."

The crowd was suddenly silent
As the Rabbi began:

"My dear people: Two thousand years ago
The **Amalekites** set out to destroy our ancestors.
They ravaged and devastated our land,
Set fire to the Holy Temple
and dispersed our people.
For two thousand years we have been wandering
Over all lands.
We have survived pogroms, inquisitions,
The Black Plague, **Chmelnitzky's** horrors.

Many false accusations libeled us:
We recall the Dreyfus case, the **Beilis** trial.
Our homes were ransacked, our women defiled.
We fled
Overseas and over continents,
Seeking a haven and respite."

"Wherever we were accepted
We improved the land
Erecting hospitals, schools, great cultural
institutions,
Contributing physicians, specialists in every area of
endeavor,
Physicists, musicians, daring entrepreneurs,
Writers, philosophers, financiers,
Bankers and jurists,
Nobel laureates in every field."

"But, dear people, it was all to no avail:
Our reward was anti-Semitism.
Yet, the spark of our Jewish faith remained in our
hearts.
Remember--never forget--
Who we are,
We are Jews forever."

"In our Holy Torah it is written:
`Remember **Amalek**! Never forget!'
Multitudes of **Amalekites**
Disappeared from the earth;
No trace of them remains.
Dear friends, what is the lesson
Of `Remember **Amalek**'?
It is that our people
Are eternal, a beacon to other nations.
Yes, our Heavenly Father may punish His people
But He will never forsake them."

"We must maintain our faith in God.
You shall see: This is but a test.
Recall the story of the sacrifice of Isaac.
You shall see: The Lord will protect us.
He will send angels
To crush our foes."

"Their names will be erased
From the memory of the world
And we Jews, God's children,
Shall settle in our homeland.
We will build it--plant new trees,
Cleanse the Holy Land of ugliness
And bring back milk and honey.
Rise from the ground,
My dear friends,
Hold yourselves erect,
Lift high your heads,

And let us together sing,
Sing our anthem in a unified voice."

The rabbi placed his hands on our shoulders
And the three of us
Began to sing `**Hatikva'**.
Slowly--the voices grew stronger--
Out of the deserted homes,
From behind the broken windows,
Jews joined in our song
And all together, with high resolve
We sang our song of liberation.

The fat pasty-faced German,
Strode up to the Rabbi of Derewna.
`Sag deinen Juden das wir marschieren muessen.'
Tell your Jews we must march, he commanded.

The Rabbi of Derewna, his voice proud,
Responded to the pale-faced one:
`Ich habe meinen Juden was ich sagen muesste schon
gesagt.'
I have already told my Jews what I needed to tell them.

The night passed, the stars disappeared,
The sun began to beam its rays.
The noise and the shouts were heard again:
" Aufstehen! Aufstehen! Machts schnell! Machts
schnell!"
Get up! Get up! Hurry! Hurry!"
Whips in hands were ready.

Once more the rucksacks were tossed over
shoulders.
The journey to Dworetz resumed.
This time we were led to a depot
And packed into open railroad cars.
The two of them and the four of us
Occupied a corner
The train started slowly,
Its whistling and puffing accompanied us on our
journey.

Gradually the sun disappeared,
Clouds took its place.
A strong wind swirled the dust,
Obscuring road and path.
Thunder and lightning shattered the skies,
Hurtling a deluge on the ground below.

The rain washed our clothes
And cleansed the sweat from our faces.
Our mouths opened for

A few drops,
To quench our thirst.

Sarah and I vied to see whose mouth
Would fill up first.
It did not take long
And Sarah had a mouthful of rain.
She did not think long
But sprayed me forcefully
With her mouthful.
I had one ready for her;
Without hesitation either
I showered her from head to toe.
We all laughed.
Sarah sang a little song
About "**mayim**, **mayim**"
That made us smile.

The winds drove the clouds away.
The sun suddenly reappeared,
And dried our clothes.

The sun's warmth could not reach
The inner layers of our clothing.
The dampness cooled my trousers
And caused them to cling to my skin.
Sarah started to comb Mother's hair,
Smoothing, and kissing it all the while.
Then she handed Father his **tfilin**
And he intoned a blessing,
Then handed them to the rabbi,
Who recited the same blessing.
The **tfilin** were passed from hand to hand
Until they disappeared from our view.

The train approached the Dworetz station,
Then slowly came to a halt.
The doors opened. Everyone was eager
To detrain as quickly as possible.
The Germans began to count us,
Then hurried us into the camp.
A Gypsy hut became our address.

During the good years Gypsies had lived there--
Families with innumerable little ones.
In good times people would flock to hear
What the Gypsies had to say,
Foretelling all sorts of happy events
And earning a living in that way.

The Germans had driven out the Gypsies
And now forced the Jews into those homes.
Once again a sad life was ordained for us.
The wooden hut was very small.
Its floor, hard-packed black earth.
Two-tiered plank beds lined the walls.
Families were assigned to the lower level,
Others to the upper ones.
The bottom level became our new home.
Sarah chose the corner. Next to
Our parents' bed
While I slept close to Father.
Next to me were my two cousins,
Reuven and Godl.
Their father was Itshke, their mother, Sorke.

Our rucksacks served as pillows
And our clothes as mattresses;
Which were thus always "pressed".
These were the two levels on which we lived.

In the attic my mother's second sister
Found her place. She was Rokhl,
Her husband Yankl.
Their two children, Leybe and Neoma.

We spent our first night there.
Somehow, Sarah crept out of her corner
And began to tickle my feet to gently wake me.
"Let's get out of here for a breath of fresh air
And look over the camp."
Quietly we walked out of the hut
And started our tour of the place.

It was large, occupied by thousands of Jews
Driven here

From towns and villages.
Barbed wire topped tall fence posts,
All guarded by Germans.
They were perched in high towers
With guns ready

The farther we walked, the more fearful
We became. Hundreds of Jews stood in rows
At the wide gate.
Jews from Rubzewitz among them.
Of the three hundred driven out before us,
Forty-five perished along the way,
Neoma Ruditzky told us.
And Motte, Tamara's son, added:
Digging out rocks and loading railroad cars,
Was our work, here.
The threat of death was ever-present",
We were told by Moyshe the Carpenter,
"And insufficient nourishment was our reward."
The farther we walked, the greater our sadness.
Tears appeared in Sarah's eyes
And both of us finally paused.

How will we get along? What will we do to earn a
living?
What will we do for food?
Sarah searched for answers in my eyes.
We stood there, arms around each other. Then--
It seemed to me that someone was standing beside us,
My sister whispered:
"Sh-sh! Don't speak. Let's run!"

A friendly hand patted us both on our shoulders.
"Don't be afraid, children."
We recognized his voice
"Oh, our Rabbi! How kind of you!
Where are you? Where are you living?
What do you do?" Sarah's questions gushed.
"They brought the Rabbis here from the villages
And prepared living quarters for us.
It's not good and not bad:
It's better than nothing. We'll make the best of
it,"
Said the Rabbi.

Sarah responded disconsolately to the Rabbi's
questions.
"We're in that little house
Over by the barbed wire.
There we found a place to sleep.
It's bad, really, bitter...
Enough to make you shudder.

There's no space to stand or sit
And I'll have to forget about writing.

I interrupted their conversation.
"We're surveying the camp
To see if we can escape."

"We must run from here
As from the flames of a fire.
We can't let them contain our lives."
Sarah spoke searingly:
"Let's run from here",
And fell at the Rabbi's feet.

"Rise up, my child. Remember what I said
In Liuptz? Straighten your back,
Raise your head high.
No one will help us but our God!"

The Rabbi's wife started to converse with Sarah,
Asking where her diary was hidden.
"I don't know whether it
Will be of interest to anyone!
My grandmother promised to guard it.
I wrote and recorded what I saw and heard.
But I have nothing to write with now.
I poured my heart out in those pages
And couldn't part with them.

"Our parents asked about you.
They were worried.
We'll tell them we met you."

"We'll come to visit you as soon as we can."
They hugged us tightly, sent regards
And best wishes to our father and mother.

"Khazak v amats"! Strength and endurance be
yours, dear children."

We rushed back to the Gypsy hut.
Mother and father were sitting outside,
Holding hands.
Smiles covered their faces
As they spied us from afar.
They kissed and caressed us.
Where had we been?

"We went to see what the camp was like.
We met the Rabbi. He gave us hope", said Sarah.
"We also met some of our Rubzewitz neighbors."

"Tell us, please, what happened to them?
We were given soup for you," continued father.
"We sipped ours, and this is for you.
Like it or not,
Shut your eyes, and open your mouths
And swallow it as fast as you can."

"We must return to Rubzewitz," Sarah urged.
Escape from here as soon as possible.
On our way to Rubzewitz, we'll gather up our little
ones
And go on to stay with the villagers."

"Daughter dear, early tomorrow morning
I must go to the gate
And report for work," replied father.
"We have to get Mother out of here,
Find work for her among the gentiles.
Otherwise, she'll die."

Despair overwhelmed us.
I held Sarah's trembling hand.

I felt a buzzing in my head.
Days and nights passed
Our situation worsened daily:
Mother lost her zest for life.
Her tears dried.
The smile was gone.
It was more that I could bear. I thought:
I must find a weak spot
In the barbed wire fence
And get out of here

So that I may return with food
To sustain our lives."

In the bitter cold of early morning
Sarah and I crept from our pallets,
Ran out of the Gypsy hut
And began examining the wire fence
Guarded by Germans. Sarah started to plan
And found a suitable place at once.
"Just see: bushes on the other side of the fence.
Weeds growing there, too. They will hide you
As you crawl under the fence.
Yes, this is the spot." Sarah was certain.

"You once told me that when you were in the **Betar**,
The Zionist youth group," she continued,
"You were taught how to crawl
On your stomach and on your back
And to feel your way with your hands.
Come, show me that you haven't forgotten all that."

At once, I dropped face down, propping myself
On my elbows, and began to crawl quickly,
Then turned on my back with my hands free.

"You hold a stick in one hand, remember?
Raise the wire with your other one
As you crawl under,
Then get back on your belly and crawl
Until you reach the grass.
Now, do it all again."

Sarah had to hold her hands over her stomach,
From laughing so much--but quietly.
"You looked like a cat, inching along.
You've become a true acrobat."

"Now I'll go over to the guard
And see if I can start
Talking to him about something."

I immediately, crept along
On my stomach, then on my back,
Crawled under the wires
And disappeared into the weeds.

I thus saved Sarah the trouble
Of talking with the guard.

Peasants were already working in the fields,
Cattle and sheep were grazing.
One sheep became separated from the flock
And ran towards me.
I quietly blocked its way
And forced it back into the fold.
The shepherd appeared in the distance
And walked slowly in my direction.

"I can't run as fast as you--
My right leg is shorter than my left.
Could you help me with my sheep?"
He asked, shaking my hand.
"My name is Yurek."
"And mine is Yanek," I responded.
"Of course, I'll gladly help."
My father is over there a ways;
He's plowing with the horses.
Soon we'll have our midday meal,
And I'll tell him about you then."

He removed a knife from a little sack,
Broke a twig from a tree
And began whittling a whistle.

He worked at it diligently.
But it didn't work.
I took it from him,
Separated the core from the bark at one end,
Cut here, turned it over, cut there,
And the whistle was soon in working order.
He liked it very much
And began to carve another one.
We became good friends
And the time passed quickly.

Yurek was my age.
He did not have much schooling, he told me,
But was able to read and write.
"Tomorrow I'll bring my books," he whispered.

The sun appeared in the middle of the sky--
It was time for the midday meal.
The peasant tethered his horse to rest.
He fed it oats, and there was plenty of water.

He brought a sack of food to us.
Without waiting long, Yurek introduced me to his
father:
"This is my friend, Yanek.
He is quick with the sheep
And likes the cows.
He can even speak to them.
See: He made this whistle for me.
Try it; see how good it sounds."

He put the whistle to his mouth
And blew with both his lungs.
"Tomorrow I'll bring my books
And we'll do our lessons together,"
Said Yurek, laughing with the pleasure of
anticipation.

From a distance I saw you
Turn the sheep back to the flock.
You run faster than the sheep do.

"Come, let's eat now," said the father.
He asked few questions and I asked none.

Yurek and I helped set out the meal.
I was very hungry and ate without stopping.
There was much food left, which the peasant
gathered up,
And, placed in a bag, which he handed to me.
Then my friend Yurek turned to his father:
"May I introduce my new friend to my other ones?"

His father glanced at us quickly.
"Today Yanek must go home
He doesn't live far. He'll ask his parents
Whether you may take him home with you."

"In the meantime, don't tell your friends about
him.
They don't need to know what you have in mind."

"I won't tell anyone," said Yurek.
But, may he come again tomorrow?"

"Yes, he may meet you
Out in the field at any time,
And you may do anything
Both of you would like to do."
Yurek danced with glee
And put his arm around me.

His father re-hitched the horse
And continued his plowing;
We returned to the flock
And continued to talk.

"Tomorrow I'll show you how to make a burrow
To shield yourself from rain," I told Yurek.
"No one will be able to find it.
And don't tell anyone.
I have lots of things to tell you
And I'll share whatever I know with you:

How to light a fire, where to catch a hare,
How to make a bow and arrow."

We shook hands: He would tell no one.

"Come, let me show you how to milk a cow."
From his sack he removed a small pail
And milked until it was filled.

"Now let's drink it."
Never before
Did I drink milk that way.
It was warm, and I took small swallows.

The sun will soon disappear
And it will grow dark.
Then I'll have to crawl back
Through the guarded fence,
Back to my dearest ones,
So wearied, so harried.
I'll drag the food to them past the barbed wire
And do whatever else I can
To sustain them.

Tomorrow morning the sun will shine again
And everything around me will be bright.
Sarah, will walk with me again.
Her kiss and blessing will light my way.
Once again I'll meet Yurek;
We'll guard the sheep and pasture the cows.
I'll rise early
Recite the morning prayer and ask
That He grant me leave to refresh my soul
With clean air; implore Him to lift the wire
When I am crawling under it;
Pray that He shield me from the bullet.
"Hear the prayers of my father and mother
And imbue me with the will to live, O God!
If I ask too much, then give me less.
I beg Thee, forsake me not."

With the prayer still in my heart
I dropped to the ground.

Tied the food to my legs
And on my stomach hurried toward the fence.
Turning onto my back, I freed my hands
To raise the wires and squeezed through quickly.
Sarah was impatiently waiting for me.
She grabbed me with both hands.
With a smile on her lips and a tear on her cheek.
We ran to Mother and Father,
Who peppered me with questions.
I answer gladly and told them
What I planned to do on the following day.

In the evening the rabbi and his wife
Visited. He embraced all of us and brought good news:
"We have found work for you, Sarah.
Not, God forbid, carting rocks.
I spoke with Novick about you
And he has a suitable job waiting for you."

"Who is Novick?" Sarah asked.
"Novick is the `Judeneltster',
The German appointed chief of the Jews here.
He must see that whatever the Germans demand
Is obeyed. He is our finest:
A man of great understanding and wisdom.
He defends us at the risk of his own life
And sometimes he succeeds
In making life a little easier for us
And in circumventing an evil edict.
He needs you. He wants to meet with you
immediately."

Sarah washed her face,
Took her pressed dress from under the bed-plank
And quickly dressed. She combed her hair
And looked beautiful.

"It won't take long. Sarah will be back soon
And will tell you everything."
The rabbi paused
Lost in thought.
"I'd like to take you with us,
But I don't know how that could be done.
If I could get you out of here

I would be performing a great **mitzvah**.
Sarah, child,
I'd very much like to read your diary.
Could you tell me where it is?
And what you wrote in it?"

"I left it with my grandmother
In my town, in the home I was born in
And where I was brought up Jewishly
I recorded the joys and sorrows of my daily life
Which helped drive away my loneliness.

Grandmother did not think too highly
Of the fact that I was writing:
`What can such a young child write?' she would say.
Yet she promised to defend and protect it with her life.

That was her vow. `They may shoot me,
But how can they kill your writing?' she would say.
`You will see--your diary will outlive all of us.'
`Can the non-Jews read Yiddish?
Of what use, then, would it be to them?', I asked.
`You must stop worrying about it,' she would urge.

"That, Rabbi, is a brief account of my diary.

When she returned Sarah was visibly pleased.
She bestowed kisses on all of us.
Then she divulged her good tidings.
"I'll be sitting there, writing.
No one will disturb me.
I'll write whatever I wish."

"I never meant to annoy you when you wrote," I said.
"I simply wanted to know
What you were always writing and to whom...
At what time will you go, and when will you return?"

"Don't worry, brother.
I shall leave and I shall return,

And let you read
Everything I write, if you wish.
You need not worry. You know
That I love you very much
And shall never desert you."

Sarah rose early and accompanied me
To the barbed wire fence. She kissed my cheek,
Looked into my eyes and assured me, once again,
of her loyalty to me.

I did not tell my friend Yurek any of this,
Keeping my sadness to myself.

I set to work. We began by making a bow and
arrow.
When it was finished, I showed him how to use it.
Yurek was very pleased.
He talked to the cows, drove the sheep
And showed the bow and arrow to his father

Who was greatly pleased.
He patted us both on the head.
Examined our useful weapon and we all laughed.
Now let us see what it can shoot."
He aimed at a bird but it
Flew away and disappeared. The man was disappointed
And returned the bow and arrow to us.

The summer day passed quickly.
Slowly the bright sun departed
Taking with it its radiant beams.
I hurried to return to my parents
And to Sarah. I did not hesitate,
I did what I had to, and soon
I was on the other side of the fence.
I looked for Sarah
But could not find her.

Sad and disappointed, I started back with my sack

of food
To my father and mother.
Arriving, I placed the package down impatiently
And turned to my mother:
Where is Sarah? Where did she go?
What happened to her?"
Mother tried to make excuses:
"Sarah will be here soon."

"She was supposed to meet me
At the barbed wire. Why wasn't she there?"
I spoke angrily.

I buried my head in my hands
And felt lost.
"If she doesn't return soon
All three of us will go
To find her," my parents assured me.

My eyes brightened and my heart was filled
With anger and joy
When I recognized her from a distance.
"Yankele, dear little brother, forgive me
For not meeting you. I was writing,
Erasing, and talking with people,
Trying to help Novick in every possible way."

If you wish, Ill take you with me tomorrow
And you'll see for yourself
How busy I have been.
Still angry, I retorted:
"I'd rather crawl through the wires
Than sit beside you. You just want
To get away from us as soon as you can
And forget about us."

"Don't say that and don't ever think it.
You know I would never do that."
She held my face between her hands
And searched my eyes.
"I understand how you feel.
The times allow us no choice.
We must be patient with each other

And all will be forgiven.
I'll go to the fence with you tomorrow
And you'll meet your friend again.
You'll begin a new day, play airs
On your whistle, and shoot your bow and arrow.
You'll sit on the grass,
Run about, and tend the sheep and cows.
And when the sun begins to set
I'll meet you at the fence.
And I'll find you in a good mood.
Remember, if I am late again
Don't rant, hear?
The food was most welcome
It appeased the day's hunger.
About tomorrow- let's not worry."

Mother suggested that Sarah and I
Sleep in the attic.
"It's difficult to climb the ladder,
But you'll have more air up there."

Sarah came late from work and was so
tired
She could barely keep her eyes open
While speaking with me. She would fall asleep
And rise early in the morning
To accompany me to the fence
And from there leave for work.
The less I saw of Sarah the more I longed
For my little sister and brother.
I often cried unseen
And frequently dreamed about them.

Once, Sarah returned early
And I suggested
"Let's go back to Rubzewitz.
We'll get the little ones out
Of Ivenietz and all of us--
Father, Mother, you, I, and Grandmother-
Will go to the good gentiles
And find a place among them."

Sarah interrupted, and took my hand.
She wanted to tell me something,

But tears choked her.
"I must tell you a secret, but you must promise
Not to tell Mother and Father.
I purposely came home early today to talk to you.
Seven hundred young children
Were taken out of the ghetto
And murdered in a horrible way."

"And what about our two?"

"Our Itshele and Mirele were among them.
And that is not the entire tragedy.
The elderly who remained in Rubzewitz
Were driven out to the pits and murdered.
Only with the gentiles' help could the Germans perpetrated this
slaughter.

Dear little brother, there is no reason
To go back to Rubzewitz.
The gentiles will not accept us
And we won't find refuge among them."

Sarah stared at me questioningly.
"Do you hear what I'm saying?
Do you understand my words?"

I held her between my hands,
Looked into her blue eyes.
"Do you know what you are saying?
How can you invent such stories?
Have you gone mad?"

Sarah was silent. Tears flowed down her cheeks.
She cried bitterly and could not stanch her tears.

My Aunt Roklh and my Uncle Yankl
Scolded me. Why was I making Sarah miserable?
What did I want of her? Why do I do such things?
They wanted to know.
Sarah shook her head.
"No, no. It is not his fault that I am crying.

He hasn't done or said anything. I can't understand;
I refuse to accept."

Rokhl embraced Sarah and lovingly caressed her,
Smoothing her blond, wayward hair.
Sarah calmed down and fell asleep in Rokhl's arms.
I tossed from side to side, and could not fall asleep.
Seven hundred children--little ones,
Tossed into pits and covered with earth.
How could such an evil deed happen?
They didn't die normally: they were suffocated!
Sarah's words frightened me.
It can't be that she's lost her mind, can it?
Gone mad?

Just listen! Can you fathom it?
Jewish old men and old women, some able-bodied
some infirm,
Driven into open graves and shot.
Was my grandmother among them? How can that
be?
Sarah must be crazy.
I cannot believe it!
These were my thoughts as I muffled the secret
within me...
To concoct such dreadful things!
To have a mad sister
Added to all my other problems
I must find a way to escape from this place
Or I too will go mad.

The sun shone through the holes in the roof
And illuminated the attic.
"Sh- sh- Don't wake her", Aunt Rokhl cautioned.
"Keep quiet."

"You think I'm asleep, but I'm not.
My brother Yankele, may he be well,
Tossed about all night,
And talked a great deal in his sleep."

"There is some water in that little pot.
See that you don't spill a drop.

Wash your sleep-starved face with it,"
Said Aunt Rokhl, smiling, to Sarah.
"Did you happen to hear
What Yankl said in his sleep?"

Both our elders started to laugh.
"Let's climb down from this attic
And see what Father and Mother are doing."

They crawled off their planks
And smilingly greeted us.
"How did you sleep in the attic?"
Sarah replied, smiling:
"Yankl talked in his sleep all night.
The only words I could really hear
Were that I had gone crazy."

I did not understand why they laughed.
The morning passed quickly;
Sarah went her way and I, mine.

That day Yurek and I built a shelter,
A refuge in case of rain.
"A shovel and an ax are all we'll need",
I explained to Yurek. He
Received his fathers permission to use two
shovels
And an ax, which he brought to us.
We found a suitable spot among some trees
And both of us went to work. We struck several
Bark-covered tree roots. They would be very
useful,
In keeping the soil from collapsing.
We'll have to bend some and cut others,
But that's how we'll build a wall with them", I
explained.

Yurek's father came to see what we were doing.
"How did you know how to build this?" he wanted to
know.

"My father taught me. His name is **Betar**.

He knows how to plow and how to plant,
How to sharpen the scythe, and cut grass.
He can heal horses and cattle when they are sick,
How to help sheep deliver their young,
How to get bees to make honey.
He is able to apply cupping glasses on people
who are ill
Mend shoes or sew new boots.
He is helpful in many ways
And will not ask to be paid a great deal for his
services.

Yurek's father smiled.
Took me aside and said:
"I cannot do it and I dare not.
If the Germans find him here
They'll chop off his head
And arrest me. That would be the end of all of us.
I know that you creep under the wires.
You resemble Yurek. No one knows about this
And no one sees anything, and that is how
It must remain. Yurek has asked me many times
To take you home with us. He knows that he must not
tell anyone.
Continue to do what you're doing, and we'll help you."

Once again Sarah came home with news.
She took me aside and told me
Things I could not believe
About Zhetel and Meytshet,
Nowogrodek and Nowyelno,
About towns large and small.
The Germans had issued a call
For shoemakers and tailors.
They were needed to mend soldiers' boots
And to sew gloves for the military.

"The Germans will send such tradesmen to Smolensk,
Where they'll work in factories and be treated
well.
Or so they promised.
Novick's advice is that Father go and that he take
you, too.
You'll take care of Father and

I'll do the same here for Mother" added Sarah.
"I'll settle her among the gentiles and then
We'll see what else we can do.
I'll know more in a few days
And will tell you everything."

I did not want to ask too many questions,
For fear that her floodgate of tears would be opened.

"May I ask one question?
How do you know all this?
How can you say you'll separate from Father
And I from Mother? And how will she
Survive without her children?
And without her dear beloved husband?"
I remained silent.

"You must understand:
It is our situation that forces us to participate
In these activities. Perhaps this is the only way that
At least one of us will remain alive.
If we stay together, we'll perish together.
We can't go home and there is nowhere to hide."
Once again, she cried.
"Sh- sh-! Don't cry. I'll go to Smolensk with
Father."

"I'll go there and then, I suppose, you'll say
`Anything, not to sleep on the planks.'
And perhaps I'll go to school there
And ride on tramways. Ha- ha- ha..."
"Stop Laughing!"

Time passed quickly. The news spread like
wildfire
And everyone wanted to go to Smolensk.
Mother received the news impassively.
Her attitude towards the situation
Calmed our fears.
She neither cried nor asked questions;
She merely kept shaking her head.

"Do you hear what I am saying, Mother?" asked Sarah.
"I hear what you are saying, child."

"If you don't want them to,
They won't go to Smolensk.
The Germans aren't forcing us to do it.
Novick, the president of all the Jews here,
Has important connections.
He puts great trust in me and has advised me
That this is the only way to remain alive."
So Sarah tried to convince Mother.

"What can my life be like
When my soul is taken from me?"
Her face was pale and wet with tears.
Silently, she pressed Father and me to her.

Sarah made ready two small rucksacks,
One for Father and the other for me.
We fastened them across our shoulders
And all four of us-Father and Mother, Sarah
and I --
Walked out. Sarah held my one hand,
Mother caressed the other.
Father held Mother by the arm to help her
walk.
Soon we would be separated.

Sarah spoke:
"In our Torah it is written
That God will curse His people.
He will punish us for our sins
And we shall suffer hail and brimstone.

It is written that one from each city
And two from each family will survive.
Our wise men taught
That we are not to question God's ways,
But we shall all ask that He keep His word
And that, if not two, then at lest one
From our family will survive."
Trucks were close at hand,

Ready to transport us.
My father's name was called
And immediately after, mine.

Sarah wiped the tears from her face;
Mother stood motionless.
Father and I boarded a truck
And we took our last look at Sarah and Mother.

CHAPTER 12

From Dworetz they sent us to Nowoyelnye
And herded us into the famed synagogue.
With Jews from Mejchet and Zhetl, from city and village--
From the east wall to the west one, on tables and on benches-
The synagogue was soon packed to overflowing.

I found a place in my father's bosom, to which he held me tight.
Not only cobblers and tailors were there with us
In the house of prayer, but Rabbis and **shokhtim**.
They came streaming in, and all of one mind:
Determined to outlive the Nazi beast
And return to our women and children left at home.

The sun began to sink
Its rays shining on one wall then another
Through the tall windows of stained glass
Adorned with the Twelve Tribes.

Silence soon descended upon the splendid house of worship
And the cantors raised their voices.
It was our ancient **Kol Nidrei** that they chanted.
And all of us, from pew and table, rose
To join them with one voice.

That one night was the length of our stay.
In the morning we were loaded into freight cars
With food and drink en route to Smolensk.

We were transferred to another group of Germans
At the depot in Smolensk.
We were brought to the suburb of Krasnybor
And into another labor camp.
Jews from Kosevo and **Bereza-Kartuska**,
From regions distant and unknown

All thrust together.
Captured Russians, too, were among us.
Who would police us now?
Great workshops for shoemakers and tailors
Were ready, and in the attic
We were ordered to bed down.
Men from each town stayed together
And shared the food allotted to them.

At first we were not treated too badly. But when the shoemakers and the tailors entered the shops, the troubles began- for more than half of the men there had no idea how such work was done.

Those of us who were tailors and shoemakers, started working immediately to transform the rabbis and cantors into tailors and shoemakers. Chayim of **Bereza-Kartuska**, who was a kind, pious man,- a shoemaker who knew Torah, could read and recite the psalms from memory and was exceptionally knowledgeable about the Talmud-,became the foreman of the shoemakers. He produced excellent boots for the officers. He paired each shoemaker with a man who had to be taught the trade. He did everything he could to speed the process of preparing new artisans. He immediately assigned several youngsters of my age to sorting the boots, pairing left with right. He also tried to assign older men to this job, but the German supervisor disapproved. "Nur die Jungen moechten die Schuhe sortieren," - only the youth may sort shoes- he ordered, and drove the older men away. My father wanted to teach me shoemaking in a hurry, and I did learn very quickly. Then **Reb** Chayim had me sit beside my father. There were about ten of us young people who soon became shoemakers. Others who were not yet proficient assumed our former tasks.

"How can I turn a Rabbi into a shoemaker in a hurry?" **Reb** Chayim complained to my father. Gradually, only those who had learned the trade were permitted to remain in the shop. The others were forced out.

Each day my father taught me something new
And soon I was a professional.
When the German overseer saw what I could do
He smiled broadly. The foreman, **Reb** Chayim,
Standing nearby, took advantage
Of the opportunity to explain to the German:

"Die sind Vater und Sohn, die Einzigen
Die aus einer grossen Familie lebengeblieben sind."
These are father and son- the only ones
Remaining from a large family.

Once a manager in Germany of a large shoe factory, the overseer was not a bad man. He respected **Reb** Chayim and only wanted us to produce a good product. He never struck or insulted anyone and was often able to help us through **Reb** Chayim.

He had only of **Reb** Chayim: "Warum sind so viele Juden keine Fachmaenner?"- How come there are so few Jewish artisans? To which **Reb** Chayim answered: "Ich werde aus ihnen Fachmaenner machen"- I will make artisans out of them.

One of the Jews we knew from Rubzewitz was Itshke Freyde Yentes. He had brought his son, Hershl, with him. At home he had been a prominent merchant, dealing in lumber and land on a large scale and donating large sums to help the people of our town. All who knew them would have done anything to help Itshke and Hershl. Itshke lost his eyeglasses and could see nothing without them. Our people brought him several pairs, but to no avail; he could not see. He was taken from us and was killed and soon thereafter his son, Hershl, was also murdered. Our hearts were heavy. We had lost the first of our Rubzewitz people.

Father began to specialize in making shoes for wounded soldiers. There was a hospital in the Krasnibor concentration camp and wounded soldiers were treated there. The German overseer would take my father to the hospital to learn how the soldiers could be fitted. First Father requested gypsum for making a mold of the man's foot. Then he took the mold to the shop and designed the proper footwear. **Reb** Chayim was very pleased when the first pair of shoes was ready and he explained to the Germans that father must personally try the shoes on the man. "Selbstverstaendlich! Das muss man machen!"- Understandably! That's how it must be!" My father turned to the German: "Ich moechte meinen Jungen mitnehmen? Er wird mir helfen koennen." May I take my son with me? He'll be able to help me. The German agreed, and my father soon became highly regarded in the hospital. The soldiers wanted to pay us. The wounded men did not have much, but they gave us what they could.

Reb Chayim from **Bereze-Kartuska**, and Shmuel Dovid from Rubzewitz were our foremen and our guides. To reach the attic- where we slept-, we had to climb a tall ladder. The rungs of this ladder broke from continual use, and many of our people sustained injuries to their arms and legs because of it. **Reb** Chayim made new rungs for the ladder, and hid the broken ones. When everyone finished climbing up, the broken steps were replaced on the ladder so that should the Germans or the Russian observers decided to visit us, they would find it difficult to come up.

Although it was not easy to reach the attic, it was a worthwhile accomplishment. It became our autonomous space. There we would plan how to make craftsmen of our unskilled and harassed people. We managed to bring up certain tools to help us teach the "golden trade".

Our second task was to see to it that those who succeeded in obtaining more food than others, shared it with the less fortunate. We, who became proficient workers, gladly cooperated. Of every kettle of food we received, half would be set aside, and later brought up to the attic. This work was done by the young ones. Our efforts helped curtail the "liquidation" of the unskilled.

When Father and I would go to the hospital to fit shoes on a wounded man, Father would nonchalantly ask whether he might take the newspapers if the man no

longer needed it. "Ganz bestimmt, ganz bestimmt kannst du das machen!" Certainly, you can by all means have it. A wink would accompany the reply. Father would casually wrap the shoes or the mold in the newspaper, which I would hasten to take up to the attic. I hid it there among the broken ladder rungs, and Father would quietly notify **Reb** Chayim. When we were all present in the attic, **Reb** Chayim would find the papers, read them and kiss Father and me. He would read all the news, retain it in his mind, then burn the newspaper in the flame of the small candle we had there. He cautioned Father not to tell anyone what we had done. Later, **Reb** Chayim found a way to relay the news he had read. He omitted very few of the items. He would describe the battles so we could learn what was happening around us. The news gave us courage.

The attic thus became our fortress. Despite the fact that we were locked in at night, down below in the factory three dogs served as alarms. If anyone entered, the dogs would bark loudly. One night as **Reb** Chayim read the German newspaper, he started to sing at the top of his voice. This frightened the dogs and they howled. Everyone in the attic was alarmed when the Germans burst through the door with their guns at the ready. The scent of the Germans calmed the dogs. The Germans searched the shoe-making workshops but found no one there. They cursed the dogs and they left.

The dogs acted friendly thereafter. When **Reb** Chayim started to sing again, they seemed to recognize his voice. This time they didn't bark; they howled along with him. **Reb** Chayim cautioned us sternly and asked us not to laugh. He told us why.

"When I worked in the woods, I had experience with dogs. When a horse neighed, the dogs would bark in a strange way. When a flock of birds sang, they tried to imitate them, and if I sang, they seemed to laugh at me. That would make all the gentiles laugh. When these German dogs heard my voice, they didn't bark. They seemed to enjoy it, and that fooled the Germans."

And he was right. The dogs recognized **Reb** Chayim's voice- when he spoke as well as when he sang. He was able to calm them- from the attic or down below -when they jumped at him too aggressively. He seemed to understand canine language.

We crowned **Reb** Chayim our King Solomon. When he sang for us- which he did quite often- they understood him. It was so comical we had to suppress our laughter.

One of our men -Itshke the shoemaker, also came from Rubzewitz. He brought his son Alter with him. Alter and Itshke were mischievous. They made a paper crown and placed it to **Reb** Chayim's head. As they did so, Itshke chanted Solomon's Song of Songs, by rote. They then bestowed a new name upon **Reb** Chayim.

"My dear fellow Jews," Itshke began, "Let us make a Solomon of Chayim. Starting today, we shall no longer address him as **Reb** Chayim, but as **Reb Shloyme**." All of us raised our hands to vote unanimously for the new title.

Reb Chayim clearly deserved the honor, but I am not certain he consented to accept it. He soon repaid us. Removing the crown, he smiled and said: "My fellow Jews, during the course of his lifetime a Jew receives three names. The first is the one he's given at birth, as a child of God, and that name is `Adam.' Then there is the name his parents give him so that his brothers, sisters and friends may know him. That is his second one. As for the third, that he must acquire by himself, and no one can bestow it upon him. Dear friends, as you see, I am still a young man. As yet I have not yet made a name for myself. I don't know that being called "shoemaker" or "woodcutter" is of great importance. It is true, dear friends, that King Solomon knew the languages of all birds. However, all I can understand is just a little of what dogs mean when they bark, and that is not enough to make much of a name for myself. Nevertheless, if you wish to give me a nickname in a spirit of fun, you may call me `Chayim **Shloyme**.'

The summer months passed and the Russian autumn arrived, with its blustery cold winds. The leaves turned yellow and fell from the trees, only a few remaining stubborn ones on a twig tried to avoid falling to the damp ground. Birds in their characteristic flight formations flew to warmer climes. They would soon reach the Black Sea praise the Lord for having given them wings. Perhaps some of them would soar as far as the land of Israel and build new nests for themselves.

"Why are we worse off than the birds?" I asked my father softly. He answered: "The time will come when we too will stretch our wings and fly home. There we also shall build our nests."

Long trains loaded with large trees arrived at our camp to unload wood for the long, cold winter. The Soviet prisoners and our unskilled people could not manage the unloading, and the Germans in charge demanded from our foreman that the shoemakers be assigned to do the job. Our somewhat compassionate German did everything he could to see to it that we did not have to haul the heavy trees, but to no avail.

At that point, **Reb** Chayim **Shloyme** once again evidenced his wisdom. He asked the German for permission to oversee the work. He went to work, and immediately earned everyone's respect. It was not necessary to drag the trees; they could be rolled, he pointed out. We did just that. We placed the logs one behind another and pushed with poles to start them rolling. The fighting and the bickering over the unloading ceased, and the task was completed.

After a long day of hard work, we were brought to the roll call area to be counted. We received a ration of food, and were herded into the attic. The long night belonged to us. In addition to all his other fine qualities, and his singing, **Reb** Chayim could tell stories. He recounted many humorous stories about Hassidim and he made us laugh. We remained awake, waiting for the sheltering darkness of night. When the

stars appeared and all was quiet, we were able to hear from a distance, the echoes of powerful artillery fire and the bursting of shells. We opened our little windows to hear those encouraging sounds all the better.

"Sh! Let's be quiet!", **Reb** Chayim said. "Fellow Jews, don't utter a word. Let us all strain our ears to hear the good news that the wind wafts toward us. It is buoying our souls and our hearts. We continue to wait every night for the cold winds to blow away our enemies so that we may return to our homes."

This dark night brightened our days and appeased our hunger. Oh, how good it was to have a father-with whom to rejoice and about whom to be concerned, whose hand I could hold and with whom to hope! How wonderful it was to have a father- to mend my shirt and protect me from the cold, to scratch my back, tie my shoelaces, to wash me and to comb my hair!

"Fear not, my child. You will see, we shall return to our little ones, and embrace Mother lovingly. Do not fear. You are still young and full of grace. Everyone sees that; I am not the only one. Even the Germans smile when they see you."

"It's good to hear you say so, Father. I know you are devoted. Let us climb the ladder together so that I my support you and keep you from falling. We'll wait until dark to open the doors and windows and bring in Elijah the prophet. Our tears will fill his cup and he will work miracles for us."

High in the star-filled sky Soviet airplanes ripped through the clouds, but the Germans met that challenge. Hundreds of high-powered searchlights beamed through the sky, turning night into day. Bursting shells echoed from afar accompanied by the wailing of sirens. The Germans in the camp were frightened and raced like madmen into the pre-dug shelters. But the Soviets were unrelenting, dropping bombs that illuminated the entire region. Great fires were everywhere. Some bombs fell close to us.

Reb Chayim could contain himself no longer and began to chant: "Al tiro mipakhad pisom, u-meshoas reshoyim ki sovo, utsu eytso vesufor, dabru dovor velo yokum, key imonu el- Fear not a sudden fright, and the doom of the evil-ones when it comes, (let them) take advice, and it will be annulled, (let them) say what they will, and it will not be, for God is with us."

We soon joined him and every one sang. With their great planes, the Soviet airmen were devastating the Germans. The acrid smoke we were breathing was-paradoxically- wonderful for us, and we began to thank Him. We prayed softly for the fliers to return safely to their base, to revisit us as soon as possible, to avenge us and bring us safely home.

The Soviet General Zhukov commanded the front at Moscow. That is what **Reb** Chayim said, and when he spoke one had to believe him. The battles were bitterly fought and the results were most gratifying. The sounds of another bombardment

could be heard from a distance along with sirens. This time the dogs did not wait to be invited, but began to bark immediately. **Reb** Chayim began a new prayer: "Vhu yashmieynu berakhamov sheynis le-eyney kol khay"- And He in His mercy will let Himself be heard by us again for all to see." Once again we accompanied him.

The frigid winds of the Russian winter howled non-stop, and dislodged tons of snow. The roads were covered, and all movement was disrupted. We were taken out of the workshops, handed shovels, and ordered to clear the highways. The trucks were frozen and would not start. The soldiers cursed vehemently.

The mounds of snow had become ice. The shovels were useless. Even if by chance a motor could be started, the wheels remained mired in the slush. We derived a great deal of satisfaction from watching all of this, until a second shift arrived to take over.

We managed to climb up into the attic to eat the food rationed to us. Then, wearily, we collapsed onto our plank beds. My father found some excuse to go to the hospital to try on shoes- so he could wrap them in a newspaper. **Reb** Chayim found a way to read the newspaper in the workshop so he could report the news to us without delay.

Fierce battles were raging in the vicinity of Stalingrad, but not in Leningrad. That city was surrounded. The Bolsheviks would die of starvation, "like frozen dogs," the Germans said Using the characters of the German alphabet, they wrote the Russians a message: "Moskva nye stolitza, a volga nye granitza,"- Moscow will not be the capital, and the Volga (river) will not be the boundary.

On New Year's Day of 1943, the workshops were closed and we were granted a day of rest. Long trains of railroad cars marked with red crosses passed by not far from our workshops. We thought they would be routed into the concentration camp, but they passed through. They were transporting the many wounded soldiers, but there was no room for more of them where we were.

Several days later a long line of railroad cars loaded with clothing did stop at the camp. Prisoners removed the contents. Mounds of shoes, most blood-spattered, full of holes or ripped by shrapnel, were sent to the shoe shop. The tailor shops were piled high with military uniforms encrusted with dried blood or wet and soiled. Some of the uniforms were not German, but Russian.

We started to clean the clothing and tried to give them a fresh appearance. In many of the pockets our tailors found personal papers of all kinds- photographs of women and children. In one uniform a Star of David was found and in another a mezuzah was hidden. No objects were found in boots, but there were various-sized bits of foot skin which had fallen out of the foot gear. Our people brought the precious mezuzah and the Star of David to the attic, and that pleased us .

When the clothing was ready for delivery to various places, two craftsmen were assigned to ride along on each truck. **Reb** Chayim, representing the shoemakers and

Shmuel Dovid of the tailors, arranged it so that a young person and an older one would be paired. I rode with my father from one point to another. That gave us an opportunity to see the neighborhood. We returned to the camp quite surprised. As far as the eye could see, military barracks, some camouflaged with snow, others with tree branches, stretched towards the horizon. We noticed no civilians, but we did see some exhausted Russian prisoners wandering about. Most of them were barefooted and had ragged uniforms. Their faces were grim, and they held out their hand hoping we would toss shoes to them. The Germans showed no empathy. They beat the men and drove them from us. We were sternly warned against giving any shoes away. We could see that bombs had detonated in that area. Large camouflaged searchlights were everywhere.

Each delivery team observed something another had missed and all the impressions were shared in the attic. **Reb** Chayim listened carefully and found some matters to laugh about. In his opinion, the Russians would soon fly overhead and bomb our position

"From your lips to God's ears," we said.

Reb Chayim had served in the Polish army as cavalryman. He had ridden a horse and worn a saber. When he came home for Passover, he attended services in uniform. That stirred **Bereza-Kartuska**. Everyone wanted to see Chayim and observe him. When he removed his soldier's cap, his **yarmulke** was underneath. He would take the saber from his belt, don a **tallis**, take a **sider**, and begin the **Musef** . All the congregants remained silent as he intoned **Kedusho** prayer: "Vehu yashimieynu berakhamov sheynis...- And He in His mercy will let Himself be heard by us again..." In two years, **Reb** Chayim returned to his home three times. The Jews of **Bereza-Kartuska** had much to talk about. The town became quite animated.

The extreme cold and raging winds of Siberia blinded us with snow. Trees were uprooted and roofs flew through the air. The storm lasted a day and a night. We were not pleased when it subsided; we regretted it.

Tevel the Tailor also regaled us with stories. He told us how Napoleon rode up to the gates of Moscow on his white charger and how he suffered a humiliating defeat there. How the Russians drove the French back to France and played havoc with their men and women.

"You will see", predicted Tevel, "the Germans will suffer the same kind of defeat. The Russians will drive them all back to Germany and will ruin their men and women."

Reb Chayim gave us more good news. Stalingrad had fallen. The Sixth Army was surrounded. Tens of thousands of soldiers had lost their lives. The Russians had broken through the siege. The defeat of Germany was imminent. That is what **Reb** Chayim reported. Though we invariably believed him, we saw no sign of a Nazi defeat. **Reb** Chayim comforted us. "You must have patience. You will see. You will see."

Long lines of flat cars with covered armored tanks passed by the camp on their way to the Moscow front. Many trains crowded with soldiers followed behind. Cannons of all sizes, aimed toward the sky, rumbled past the camp. Everything was camouflaged and everything moved in one direction, towards the new war zone that was developing.

Soviet planes began to appear during daylight hours and soon the Germans flew to intercept them. High in the sky, they dueled. A ball of fire destroyed a plane. Another, then a third, fell in flames. Many planes were lost in the bitter battle that raged on high.

The Soviet aircraft, with the red star insignia, turned homeward and the heavens became peaceful. Here and there an airman drifted slowly to earth by parachute.

That same night our friends returned to attack the Germans. They bombed incessantly and soon the entire area was enveloped in flames which reddened the sky. **Reb** Chayim did not wait long. He brought the **mezuzah** and the Jewish star from their hiding place. As he pressed them to his heart, we all sang **Hatikvah** and wept for joy. Then **Reb** Chayim taught us a new song:

Koy omar, omar ha-shem: zokharti lokh khesed ne-u-ray-ikh
Ahavas klu-lo-soy-ikh, ahavas klu-lo-soy-ikh,
Lekhtekh akharay, akharay bamidbor, be-eretz loy zoruah.

So saith the Lord: I remember the grace of your youth
The love of your nuptials, yea, the love of your nuptials
When you followed me, followed me in the desert, in a land unsown"

I still remember the three songs we learned that day and sing them on occasion. I shall never forget them, for they inspired us, bringing us hope and buoying our will to live.

The front gradually came nearer and the word "evacuation" could be heard. Our situation changed drastically. Our tolerant German was removed and a dimwit-, a new **Haman**-, replaced him. "Ich werde der neue Aufseher auf die Schuhwerke - I am the new over-seer of the shoe factory", he announced. In the middle of his long speech, he started to scream at our **Reb** Chayim. Then he viciously slapped him. On the following day, he spilled half of our liquid meal and began to beat us. Everyone in the attic was forced to scamper down the ladder so quickly, that falling was inevitable. Tevel the Tailor broke a leg and Yoysef Binem was badly bruised. My cousin Godl was thrown from the attic. I don't know how he survived. I was forbidden to help my father fit the especially made shoes for the wounded soldiers.

Life deteriorated. We were chased out of the attic and driven into barracks. The Nazis sent us to showers, where we were sprayed with cold water. When we were returned to the barracks, we were searched. A pair of military socks was found in my possession and I was charged with committing a crime.

My penalty was twenty-five lashes. Father cupped my head in his hands as I was being flogged. After the first few blows I cried out to God, asking whether I was really guilty of such a terrible offense. Our Heavenly Father must have heard my cries, because my pain began to subside. I grew silent, unable to cry any more.

The snow was stained with blood. All of us were brutalized and bleeding. We were left lying half naked in the snow until we recovered enough to be driven into the cold barracks. We tried to comfort and help each other to ease our pain. I was beaten several more times, each time for concealing potatoes on my person.

Reb Chayim was not lashed but he was suddenly taken from us. We wailed and wept bitterly; we tore our clothes in symbolic mourning for him. Brokenhearted, we felt like orphans.

What did I know about **Reb** Chayim? Not much, and yet everything. He was about thirty or thirty-five years old, tall and strong, with black hair. His eyes sparkled and brightened his handsome face. When Chayim was young, he attended **kheder** and the government school for Jewish children. He also studied in a primary school **yeshiva**. But he did not want to be a **yeshiva bokher**, a scholar. Instead, he learned shoemaking from his father. During the summers, he worked in the forest cutting down trees and taking them to the mill to be sawed into lumber. The pay was good and Chayim sent money home to help his parents. His co-workers were gentiles. He taught them to speak Yiddish and they instructed him in their language. Chayim enjoyed joining them for a drink and laughing with them. He had a big dog that seemed to read his thoughts.

One day, a drunkard attacked Chayim. The dog, sensing what was happening, bit the man and tore his clothing. If Chayim had not stopped him, the dog would have ripped the drunkard to pieces. When the first snowfall blanketed the woods, Chayim left his faithful dog with the caretaker, and returned home to help his father make high leather boots. He was no great Biblical scholar, but he was adept at reading from the Torah. When he led the morning prayers from the cantor's lectern on the Sabbath or on a holiday, the people of **Bereza-Kartuska** took great pride in his performance. He belonged to the Zionist Organization and also occasionally visited the Talmudic academy "Tiferes Yisroel". Chayim enjoyed the company of pretty girls and laughed at life.

Whenever he could, he would visit his dog, for the caretaker reported that the animal pined for him and cried when he left. One day the dog suddenly started to bark very loudly, vigorously pawing at the ground and at a tree trunk. The caretaker could not imagine what was disturbing him. As Chayim neared the woods, the dog behaved quite wildly. When he caught sight of Chayim, he became calmer. Then he started to leap and bark at Chayim.

Chayim loved the forest. He loved to breathe its fresh air. After work, he would roam the woods, accompanied by his loyal dog, or drink with the gentiles, talk politics and plan a new world.

Our life in the attic was bearable because of Chayim. I shall remember him all my life. May his memory be blessed.

The more defeats the Germans suffered, the worse our situation became. Evacuation of the hospital was begun. The German army withdrew from the camp and the S.S. assumed command. A "selection" was announced, and the camp commandant-tall, blond, always impeccably attired and always accompanied by two soldiers ready to carry out his every command,- appeared in the roll call area. He held a finely carved baton. The Russian prisoners were lined up on one side. The commandant strode towards them but did not spend much time there. He turned his attention to our people and proceeded to scrutinize them carefully. Walking slowly and pointing his baton at each one, he "selected" Alter Itshke Shepseles' mates- Tevel the Tailor, Moyshe Isaac Tsverin and Yoysef Fraim, all from Rubzewitz.

I did not know or understand what was happening but as the Nazi came closer to me, I became aware that my father's hands were trembling. Instinctively I closed my eyes and thought of Mother, Sarah, Yitskhok and Merre-Liebe. All of them passed smilingly before me in my mind's eye. I had a drink of liquor with **Zeyde**, danced with the members of the **khevre kadishe**, and kept the "selector" with the baton out of my mind. Father, with his eyes open, watched what was happening, and told me about it later.

"He looked you over, glanced at me and slowly continued on. He pointed to men from **Bereza-Kartuska**, Kosovo, Zhetl, Nowogrodek and Nowoyelno. The strongest and the weakest of us were removed and our numbers are now significantly reduced."

We missed Chayim at every step and turn. We missed his songs so, that we could no longer sing in our barrack. We remembered his sharpness of mind and his thoughtfulness. Our rations were cut; hunger, disease and heartbreak were prevalent. Shmuel Dovid the Tailor died on his plank bed. Itshke the Cobbler was mercilessly beaten.

I knew I would have to obtain more food, but I was not sure where, when, or how to go about it. Finally, I had a plan. I divulged my plan to my father. I tied my trousers at the bottom, and left the workshop for the cellar. Soon my trousers were stuffed with potatoes. As I ran back, I wondered how I would cook them. Finding a military field kettle along the way, I brought it into the barracks. I filled the kettle with potatoes, and threw it into a burning fire. In a short time, the potatoes were done. I hid them in our bedding. Before long I was back in the workshop.

There were times when I was not successful. I was caught stealing food three times and flogged each time. My father wept bitterly and pleaded with me, vowing that he would rather go hungry than see me so lacerated. "I want you to understand that I shall not be able to go on living without you. Remember our pact- to see to it that at least one of us survives? From now on I'll give you half my ration. You must realize that there is no chance that I'll live through the war. You are my one hope, and all of us pray that you will come through these terrible times and will return home to

find Sarah's diary. Half a portion will allay my hunger. I beg of you, son, don't go into the cellars again. God will show us other ways to sustain ourselves."

"It's good to have a father to worry about and help! You give me the courage to live and you drive away my pain. And yet I can not agree with you. The pain of the lashings will pass, but our hunger will remain. Half of your portion will not assuage my pangs. What did I bring back? A few potatoes, cold and half burnt: not so much. Don't worry Father, I can bear the beatings. It's your bitter tears that I can't bear."

"I can not help it. I hope God will hear my prayer and will protect you from the Nazis when you risk your life to get us food."

A new edict was issued. The clothes we brought from home were taken from us. We were issued a white garment with a Star of David on it, and our heads were shaved. Our appearance was greatly altered, to say the least.

Suddenly there was a great deal of movement on the roads and on the by-paths as well. The German army was retreating. Evacuation of our concentration camp began. The barracks were dismantled and loaded on railroad cars. The workshops were emptied. The small number of our people still with us were crammed into trucks and sent to Mogilev on the Dnieper. It all happened so quickly, we had little time to realize what was taking place.

When we arrived in Mogilev, barracks were ready to receive us. The main building had once been a silk factory. The machines had been dismantled and sent to Germany, leaving debris and puffs of silk dust strewn about. Our group was divided into two sections: one was assigned to clean the factory, the other to assemble our workshops. I was given a broom and told to use it. Not knowing where I was going, I moved from one place to another, and on the way discovered a number of underground passages. I encountered no guards and my group disappeared from my sight. There was a mound of silk rags along the way and I accidentally fell into it. It immediately occurred to me that this might be an easy way to escape from this camp. But how could I find my way back to break the good news to my father?

Here and there a little light came through so that I was not completely in the dark. I began to talk to myself. Slowly, Fanya's face appeared before my eyes. Where are you, Fanya? Why don't I hear your strong, lovely voice? Why don't you call out more loudly? Where is the setting sun that lights up the **beys medresh**, our prayer house? Who can show me the way? I must go to Father and tell him the glad tidings: we will soon be free. We will go home to mother and Sarah, to my little sister and the brother to whom I vowed I would never leave. Let me hear the voice of my good neighbor. You cannot leave me here, after all. What will you tell my parents: That Yakov was lost in the woods?

Suddenly, I heard loud cries. Fanya's voice came closer, closer. I caught her by the hand and began to kiss and caress her. We hugged each other joyfully.

The sweet dream ended and everything vanished. I was left among the scraps of silk, wondering what had happened. However, God did not forsake me entirely. He instructed me to stay where I was and wait. I decided that I would not move from the spot.

I must have fallen asleep again, but before long my group stumbled upon the hill of rags. I quietly crept out from the pile and immediately recognized Reuben, the son of Tevel and Yoysef, the son of Binye. They realized what had occurred. We all left, together with some Germans. We had no idea where we were going. The guards finally found us and led us back to our camp.

I told Father what happened to me, and shared my thoughts with him. He thought about what I said for a while and said: "I really wish you would escape from this camp. Don't worry about me. No matter what, I shall not live to enjoy our liberation. But, the Germans patrol the underground passages. You saw it! They knew where to find all of you and brought you back to the camp. Let us suppose that you were left there. The Germans would search for you with their dogs and fail to find you. How long could you remain hidden in the rags? How could you live without food and water? You would have to find a way to get out, and, how would you do this?" Both of us were filled with despair.

"Do you remember what you learned in **kheder** about Jacob, the Patriarch, and how he fell asleep in the desert?"

"Oh, yes. I recall something about a dream he had, about a ladder that reached to heaven and about pretty girls climbing up and down the ladder. Jacob did not hesitate for long and began to speak to them. An angel became jealous, and they began to fight. But Jacob really bested the angel."

Father laughed heartily. "You have misquoted the entire story." He chuckled and continued to laugh until he had me laughing too. I didn't mind being laughed at. It was good to have Father there with me, laughing- even laughing at me.

Reuben Tevel's, a man called Bekman, Yankl Moyshe Ayzik's, Itshke the Tailor, my cousins Reuben and Godl and my own father were transferred to another work group. My father's wish to run away gradually lost its appeal for him. He seemed convinced this was not the place to attempt it. He was convinced we would get lost in the cellars.

"We'll probably be unable to find our way and we will never get out of there," Father repeated.

There was a heavy bombardment of Mogilev. The Germans became very busy. Then, in the middle of the night, they chased every one from their plank beds. We had no idea what was happening. The door swung open and a bleeding man was tossed in.

"Aufstehen! Aufstehen! Du Hunde! Sag mal, wer dich entlaufen geholfen hat! Get up! Get up! You dog! Say who it was who helped you escape!" It was Aaron, the

son of Leyzer the Smith. Soon a second one, Yosefke, son of Binye, joined Aaron. He too was beaten. He was followed by my cousins, Reuben and Godl, their clothes and their flesh torn. They had been brutally prodded with gun barrels and stomped on.

We learned later- from the Russian prisoners- that twelve Jews were caught attempting to flee. The group lost its way and fell into the hands of the Germans. Our numbers were diminishing.

Shops were set up and work was resumed without the missing men. Russian prisoners took over those jobs. Some of these men also attempted to flee. They came to the same end.

Partisans became active in the area. They committed many acts of sabotage. We continued to hope that they would set us free before long, and that we would soon join them in the fighting. However, our wish remained unfulfilled. One morning we were herded into trucks and taken to the Mogilev railroad station. Long lines of local Jews were already there. Four of the twelve Jews who were separated from us were brought to the railroad car- Aaron, Yoysef, and my cousins, Reuben and Godl. They were so brutalized, it was almost impossible to recognize them.

We were shipped by train to a large concentration camp in Minsk. This new camp was enclosed by electrified fences and was guarded by Nazis. A cavalry unit had previously been stationed there. The cement floors now served us as our bed. Father and I walked through the camp. We found out that the inmates called the place "Cavalry." It was a transit center through which people arrived and departed. Where they came from originally was known, but their destination was not. We met some German Jews who were in charge of the place. They were brought from Berlin, counted separately and segregated. Their barracks were fenced in and entrance was forbidden to anyone not housed there, but conversation with them was allowed.

A woman and her child stood at a window and kept looking in our direction. Father struck up a conversation with her. She wanted to know where we were from originally, and where we had been before being transferred to this camp.

I interrupted them: "Mag Ich sie besuchen? - May I visit you?" I asked. "Wie kannst du, Junge, hereinkommen? - How, young man, can you get in here?" She said that if I were caught, I would be beaten. I replied instantly that it did not matter to me. I dropped to the ground quickly, turned over on my back, raised the wire of the fence with my hand and crawled underneath. I ran into the barrack. Father explained to the woman that I was an expert at negotiating wire fences. I rushed to the woman' s little girl and we both laughed. Several other children gathered around us and wanted to know how I'd come in. While I understood some of their German, they laughed at my Yiddish. They studied me as though I had come from another planet. Soon there was quite a commotion around me and the woman rushed over to quiet us. She started to lecture the children about how to behave. She offered me food and drink and then insisted that I leave at once.

I had not been in the company of children for a long time. Even though I could barely understand their language, it was a pleasure to listen to them. I pleaded with the woman to allow me stay. One of the young boys with a chess set asked me if I knew how to play. "Yes", I answered quickly. We began to set up the pieces, and a game was soon under way. The woman looked on tearfully as the children watched us play. She took my hand gently, kissed me on the head, and choking through her tears, told me that I must leave at once and return to my father. It was time for the barrack count. I bid good-bye to the children. We shook hands and I promised to try to return the next day to continue the game. Then I rushed out, fell to the ground, turned over on my back, pushed up on the fencing, and landed in my father's arms.

We hurried to the roll call field, joined the line and were counted. A ration of food was given to us, then we lay down on the hard cement floor and fell asleep. One can't sleep too long on cement, and my father soon began to speak softly to me.

"I'm very familiar with this area. We are not far from home. We could be back with our gentile neighbors in just a few hours. But how do we get out of here?"

My father's suggestion pleased me greatly. Our only connection with the outside world were the German Jews, who were being taken out of the camp to work. It was from them that we learned about the partisans and the havoc they were wreaking on the Nazis by blowing up rail lines. After every raid, all sorts of military equipment would be strewn along the tracks for long distances. It was for this reason that the Berlin Jews were being taken out of the camp- to recover what they could and to clean up. Because they could not speak Russian, they were the only ones assigned to this work. If they had tried to escape, the partisans would have mistaken them for German spies.

My father saw no other way out but to try to leave the camp with the labor squad of Jews from Germany. But his attempts to accomplish that failed. Then, the Jewish detainees from Smolensk and Mogilev were suddenly evacuated. The camp commandant's explanation was that we would be taken to the Lublin region to work in a new labor camp. We would be given enough food; other suitable conditions would be provided for us. We should be pleased to be leaving Minsk, where there was no work for us. Our food would be brought to the railroad cars. He wished us a good trip.

Not only the Mogilev transport- all of whom were Jews- were taken to the railroad cars. There were also gentiles there: officers who had been taken prisoner, communists, intellectuals, gypsies- all the "usual lawbreakers" as well as other persons of various nationalities.

The cars were packed, and the long train began to move. Two small windows reinforced with wire were our only source of air. Before long, everyone was wet with perspiration. When the train stopped, we expected to be fed, as the commandant had promised. But hours passed; the train was still stationary and we were not fed. Cries could be heard for the water and food that were promised us.

Our pleas remain unanswered. The situation grew worse by the minute. Eventually the train began to move. Motl and Leyzer, from **Bereza-Kartuska**, started to push their way toward the windows. "We must get out of here! We'll cut the wires in the windows. Let us through, dear friends; we don't want to step on you. Those who are able, may escape with us. That will leave more room for those who remain and will leave you with more air. If we don't get out of here, we will all die of hunger and thirst. Let us help each other with as much strength as we can still muster. We can begin by piling the dead one on top of another so that we can reach the windows."

Arieh Leyzhe was still capable of exertion. He moved to the window to help Motl and Leyzer. He climbed up on their shoulders, pulled at the wires, wrapped rags around his bleeding hands and soon the impediments were removed.

Arieh Berkowich was a son of Leyzhe the Smith's second wife. He was younger than my father. About thirty or thirty-five, he was a communist in **Bereza-Kartuska**. In his youth the Polish government imprisoned him for an extended term. He had arrived in Smolensk with his stepbrother Yakov and our Rubzewitz people.

Arieh proceeded to tell Motl and Leyzer how to escape through the window. "My dear Jews!" he began. "I am somewhat familiar with this sort of thing, and I'll share whatever I know with you. I'll leave first, and with God's help I'll catch you in my arms as you break out. Allow me to demonstrate what you must do."

"To begin with, you must jump out feet first. You must hold on to the window with all your might until you feel both your feet touching the side of the car. Second, you must push away from the car with your hands and feet, as hard as you can. The wind will then help to pull you away from the moving train. Third, you must try not to land on your feet. When you start falling, put your head between your legs as soon as you can." He asked whether we understood everything he said.

No sooner said then done. Motl and Leyzer bent over. Arieh climbed up on their shoulders, went feet first out of the window, held on with his hands, and then quickly disappeared from sight.

The second to go was his young half brother, Yakov. He followed his brother's method of departure and he too was gone. Some who tried could not get through the window. They dropped off the shoulders of Motl and Leyzer. Those with any strength tried to help others. Some changed places with Motl and Leyzer and offered their shoulders as jumping off points. Try as he could, my father just couldn't get through the window. He fell from the shoulders of those supporting him. I was desperate and did not know what to do. My father encouraged me to escape and urged me not to worry about him. He pleaded with me, but I wouldn't listen. I simply could not leave him.

There now was, indeed, more room and more air in the car. When the train arrived at a camp, the doors flew open and we all tumbled out. Waiting for us were Germans, some with guns aimed at us, others holding on to large vicious-looking dogs ready to tear us apart. I shook with fear and I clung to my father.

"Transport aus Minsk, schuster, hierausgehen!- the transport from Minsk, shoemakers depart!" came the order. Those who heeded the order were chased into a barrack. The rest remained standing. Not far from us was a high barbed wire fence. It seemed like the entire transport consisted of people streaming in the same direction, flanked on both sides by Germans and their dogs.

"Macht's schnell, macht's schnell! -Hurry up! Hurry up!" shouted the Germans, while their dogs barked continually. My cousins, Godl and Reuben, decided they wanted to join most of the people who were leaving. My father pleaded with them not to go but to remain with us. But my cousins had their reasons. The Germans, they said, would need shoemakers. They would also need mechanics to fix their trucks. Father held me firmly by the hand lest I be influenced by my cousins, who were both were pulling me to go with them.

Everyone was moving towards the tall chimneys visible ahead. None of us knew what they were. We thought they were probably factory smokestacks. It was not till later that we found out what they were.

The bodies of the dead on the train were tossed to the ground, and the rest of us were driven back into the cars and transported to still another camp. After traveling a few more days, we arrived at camp Blizhin. There we were marched to showers where we were doused with a few drops of cold water. Our heads were shaved, our clothes were taken away and replaced by others.

The clothing issued to us did not fit, and a busy exchange activity ensued. With God's help, my father managed to find clothes that fit us- more or less. A piece of string kept his pants from falling; my clothes were ludicrous.

The shoemakers among us were assigned to Block 9. Father took me for a walk through the camp. We found Jews from the vicinity of Radom in Poland and others who were brought here from various places. There were Galician Jews wearing their own attire. They laughed at my Lithuanian accent and I could scarcely understand their Galician dialect. My father became an interpreter. He translated the speech of the Galicians for me. They insisted on talking to me, and laughed a great deal at everything I said, but except for my Lithuanian accent, there was really nothing to laugh about.

There was little at this camp to bolster our morale. There were no Soviet planes in the air, no bombs falling and no searchlights illuminating the darkness of the night. Instead of soldiers' blood-stained shoes, there were huge piles of assorted pairs of children shoes. Instead of German military uniforms, there were piles of civilian trousers, shirts and valises containing all sorts of things. We soon learned that these were the possessions of the Jews who had been "removed" from their cities and towns. All these things needed to be sorted.

"These clothes were taken from our people", Father said. "Who knows where they were driven and what became of them?" He was all choked up. People kept

asking my father: “How did you manage to keep your little son out of the Germans' clutches?" His answer was: “It is God’s will that one of our family survive, and God has chosen my Yankele."

“Why me?”, I asked.

“You don't question God. You remember Sarah said when we departed in Dworetz: One of our family must survive to come home and find my diary."

“How old are you, young man?" I was asked.

“Twenty-three," I answered. My father smiled a little. The man laughed.

“You'll have to celebrate your bar mitzvah first!"

Of course I hadn’t had a bar mitzvah. I hadn’t had the strength or the energy to even think about one. The man who asked my age was called **Reb** Moyshe. He taught Hebrew to Jewish children and was a **Betar** leader in his town. He spoke slowly to help me understand his dialect. Moyshe proposed that my father arrange a bar mitzvah.

“How can I do that?" asked Father.

“What I don't understand is how you were able to bring your child all this way. How did you hide him from the Nazis? Did the Nazis see him? Why didn’t they take him away with the others?” The man’s questions seemed endless.

Finally, he said: “You have done every thing a father could do. Now it is your duty to prepare your son's bar mitzvah.”

Suddenly **Reb** Moyshe appeared uneasy.

“What is it?" asked Father, alarmed.

“Over there, near the barrack, there is a tall German with a large dog. His name is Nell, the Lagerfuehrer- the camp commandant. All he has to do is to gesture with his finger, and his dog will rip any person to shreds. Let us enter this barrack right now. Move slowly."

The block we entered was block Number 9. Most of the plank beds were assigned to cobblers. My father showed **Reb** Moyshe the corner in which we slept.

“The Germans very seldom enter the barracks," **Reb** Moyshe assured my father. “The stifling odor inside keeps them away. Well, the workshops will be closed soon. We had better hurry to the roll call area to be counted. Then they'll give us a little soup and the day will end with that. I must leave you now and return to my barrack, but I'll return in a few days to let you know when we'll have the bar mitzvah.” He bade us a warm good-bye and left.

My father wondered aloud: “How can he plan to have a celebration in this concentration camp?"

Meanwhile **Reb** Moyshe visited us whenever he had an opportunity. We became good friends. He wanted to know all about us, especially about Sarah and her diary. On one occasion I listened in on a conversations between the two men. It went like this: “I can’t understand how you survived all those atrocities and the drives from one camp to another." Moyshe spoke almost as though he were talking to himself. “Barefoot, half naked, hungry and cold, days and nights lying among the dead in the railroad car, without food or water. And then being close to the smokestacks and coming away alive. I just don't understand it. How were you able to evade their murderous surveillance while all of our children were taken from us?"

The man's words saddened my father. He started to tell **Reb** Moyshe about all the miraculous things that had happened to us. “And today- another miracle happened to my Yankl," he said. “Tell him, Yankl, tell him." he urged.

This is what happened that day. High barbed wire fences divided our camp in two. The potato cellar was in the SS section and Ukrainians guarded the entrance to that cellar. I joined a group of detainees going to work that day and went right to the potato cellar. It was dark, with only one small bulb to light my way. Down there I found several Jews stuffing potatoes into their trousers. After quickly tying my pants at the bottom, I began filling my trousers with potatoes. Eventually I had so many, I was unable to bend my legs. Then my pants started to slip down. The men left the cellar one by one and I was left there alone. Without much thought, I began to remove potatoes and rearrange the rest until I was able to walk. Then I started to leave.

Suddenly, I heard shouting and screaming. My arms and legs trembled. I could not think of what to do. I stood paralyzed. The cries of those being tortured gradually grew weaker. I tried to think how to get out of the place. Dear God, give me strength and let me find a way to bend my knees, a way to keep my pants from falling. And let me not lose my potatoes. Help me, God, provide this food for my father; I so want him to live. This whispered prayer was on my lips as I made my way out of the dim cellar. Outside, darkness descended and there before me on the ground lay several severely beaten Jews, their eyes closed, their bloodied potatoes beside them. If that’s what happened to them, what awaits me? I must hurry away from here! A little further on, another beaten man, then another and another. I did not know whether they were alive. From afar I saw a German kicking a Jew. Had he noticed me? I did not know. I decided to unbind my trouser bottoms and try to hide my potatoes. My whole body trembled. But the strings would not come untied.

Now it seemed the German had spied me. He beckoned me to approach him. Where my renewed strength came from I do not know, but hands and limbs suddenly grew steady. My thoughts were with Father and Mother, with **Bobie** and **Zeyde**, with Yentl, Sarah, Yitskhok and Merre-Liebe. And also with Fanya. I danced with the Burial Society, ate cakes with them and drank.

Approaching boldly and proudly, I raised my hand, saluted the German and announced that I had not stolen any potatoes.

He was suspicious. He looked at me sharply, but he did not raise a hand. Nor did I linger to hear a reply. Instead I walked again with Grandma who led me out of harm's way while I clutched my trousers to keep from losing the potatoes. The Ukrainian guard at the gate observed and understood. He asked no questions but he ordered me to disappear.

Out of nowhere a young man whom I'd never met appeared at the gate. I fell into his embrace. He had witnessed the whole horrible spectacle. He said: "You must have had an angel by your side to protect you from that murderer's fury."

At the date and time appointed by **Reb** Moyshe, two young men appeared and announced that my bar mitzvah ceremony could be started. One removed a **tallis** and **tfilin** from a little sack, the other brought a small Torah scroll, and my bar mitzvah began. I repeated all the blessings after **Reb** Moyshe. I read from the Torah scroll and sang my **haftorah**, while tears filled Father's eyes.

Softly a song floated through the air: "When I marked my thirteenth birthday/A small prayer shawl was given me to wear."

The men of Barrack 9 placed me on their shoulders while others brought gifts of many kinds: a clove of garlic, an onion, some cheese, a piece of bread, a sausage, a cigarette. All these treats filled up our pockets. Suddenly, our lookouts signaled: Be quiet, now!

We were angry at being interrupted by the Germans, but that anger gradually subsided. There was complete silence in our barrack. The electric bulb which illuminated my bar mitzvah dispelled the darkness of the night somewhat. Many hands shook mine with heartfelt good wishes. Some expressed their sentiments with a smile, others, with a tear. One by one all the well-wishers disappeared. They desperately needed their few hours of sleep.

I have attended bar mitzvahs and I have forgotten most of them. My own, however, will remain indelibly etched in my memory.

Our joy was short-lived. The dread disease- typhus- raged through the camp and it did not overlook me. I was sent to the so-called hospital, among corpses and those about to die. A high fever ravaged my body. But my father would not let me die.

He would come running to visit me at the hospital which was crowded with the sick and dying, but he was not allowed to enter. He stationed himself at the door and kept calling out to me.

"Yankele, son, come to me, my child!
Here I stand, quite close to where you lie.
You must hear my voice, you must,

For I shall not leave until you come to me!"

His cries tore me from the bed. Somehow I stumbled to the door. There, unable to stand on my feet, I fell into his arms. He caressed and kissed me and buoyed me with so much hope! I would recognize his voice, crawl out of my hard bed, fall into his arms and lie there until the guard drove him away.

My father's desperate voice did not leave me- until my condition became critical. But one day I became aware of some one pulling me by my legs. It was the orderly. Assuming that I was dead, he was about to throw me over to where the corpses were lying. To his great surprise, I was alive. And my father was at the door.

"Yankele! Yankele!" He screamed my name at the top of his lungs. The orderly helped me over to my father and left me with him. Smiling and crying, he carried me to the shoemakers' barrack.

I did begin to feel better. The dizziness gradually stopped, and thanks to my father's devotion, I eventually found myself back in the shoe workshop. I was greeted with an outpouring of love from the workers. From that time onward they called me "Yankele the Bar Mitzvah boy." There were only a few children in the camp and not only I but all of us were regarded with much tenderness.

CHAPTER 13

Gradually, I regained my strength. Father kept on saying: "It is a miracle that you came out of this ordeal alive when so many died. One must be blind not to see the hand of the Almighty protecting you. If I'd contracted that horrible disease, I would surely have died."

"But God kept me alive for one reason: to be his messenger. Alive, I was able to come to the hospital and call to you and so keep you from slipping away. **Reb**. Moyshe and his people were also God's messengers. They boosted our morale when they made your bar mitzvah. And all that extra food - your presents- helped put you back on your feet as well."

"Yes my son, God is watching over you. Yes, He was there when Grandma pulled you out of line when you took my place to go to Camp Dworetz. Just think of all your close calls: not long ago the potato cellar, that miserable journey to the place with the smoke-stacks, camp Mogilev, when you got lost in the underground complex of the silk factory, camp Smolensk, when you were not "selected" by the S.S. man who chooses those about to die, camp Dworetz, risking your life to smuggle food into the ghetto, going for Sarah, when the partisans took me for a spy. If God did all of this for you, He means for you to survive. And for one purpose: to go back home and find out about our family, to find out what happened to Sarah's diary."

"Why are you telling me all these things?", I asked.

"I'll tell you, Father continued. "Look at my feet; see how swollen they are. They are so heavy, I can hardly walk. It is an effort for me to raise the hammer to drive a nail into a shoe. This condition extends throughout my body. Without proper food and enough water, these horrible symptoms will take their toll. I grow weaker each day. Sometimes, when I do drive the hammer into the nail, I can't see the nail. You see, I'm very tired. My only incentive for living is to live for you. I pray for you every minute of the day. When I see you, I grow a little stronger, but that is not enough to keep me alive. When God will take me, He will be responsible for me. In the meantime, I will not let Him rest. I'll fight with Him, and talk with Him, I'll beg and cry until He promises me that you'll survive this ordeal. Do you remember how we promised each other that somebody would take care of Sarah's diary? I don't know what's happened to Mother, Yitzkhok, Merre-Liebe, Sarah, and **Bobie**. If they're alive, I know they are praying for us- in Dworetz or among the partisans fighting the Nazis. Wherever they are, whatever they're doing, their thought are always with us. If God hears our prayers, one of us will survive. I don't think He could be so uncaring as to overlook our torture completely. I didn't want to dwell on my health, but I must prepare you for all eventualities."

I did not fathom my father's words- I didn't want to hear them. Even so, it took me some time to pull myself together. "I don't know what you're talking about", I said, "but I am sure that I need you. I always try to find food for you. You are *my* reason for living. If I lose you, I lose everything. You are all I have. I need you more than you need me."

"Let's say that we need each other." Father interrupted. "You see, I could do much more for you if I were closer to God. Your Grandfather will be with me. You remember him? How he used to take you to his parties, and you would eat so much cake and other goodies, how he gave you schnapps to taste. He was a great man and he loved you dearly. And if Grandma is there and who knows who else, we'll always be at your side to love you and protect you. With our pleading and His help, you'll survive this ordeal."

"Why are you telling me these things?" I asked. I was torn; I could not- did not want to- hear what my father was saying. I could never leave my father; I was sure of that. I could not see myself being without him; it was unthinkable.

My father began a long monologue. "Remember when you spoke of joining the partisans and derailing trains? You remember we had a family meeting and asked ourselves how we could survive this war? And we all agreed to join the partisan movement except Grandma, who rejected this proposal? She criticized you , she called you little stinker. `You are going to derail trains? Kill the Germans?' she said. She laughed at you. `What will happen if you get sick? How will you find food? How will you protect yourself from freezing weather without a roof over your head? Hm?'

"And you said, `How do the animals survive?' `Yes,' she said, `but you are not an animal.' And you argued with her until she agreed. Do you remember that?"

And then she said, `But you'll come to visit your old Grandma on **shabes**,' while a tear ran down her wrinkled face. You put up some argument. We all were proud of you- especially Sarah. She didn't stop hugging you and kissing you. "

"Now I'll tell you my plan -actually this was your original plan. You must escape. The first thing you must do is forget about me. Let me be straight with you. God is not interested in me; every day I get weaker. You have to understand: God will take me and you'll be left alone. You'll have to carry on."

"You remember you promised your little sister Merre-Liebe and your little brother Izik you would never leave them? You remember you promised Mother you'd go back to Ivenitz and bring them back"

"You promised Grandma you'd visit her on **shabes**. So you see, you have important promises to fulfill. You have to see Fania. Remember her hollering for you: `Yakov, Yakov, where are you?' She must be a very beautiful young lady by now."

"Do you realize we are away from home two- no, three years. You must think of your future; you must forget about me."

"When they start to evacuate the camp, you must find a way to get to the potato cellar, which is located outside the camp proper. It's the last place they'll look for escapees. You know the area well; it should not be too difficult for you to do. You have been there many times. As you get far away from the little electric bulb that

lights up the cellar, start digging. Make room and cover yourself with as many potatoes as you can. Wait until it gets dark, and under cover of darkness, head for the fence. But keep yourself close to the ground. Remember **Betar**, and crawl on your belly. Remember Camp Dworetz? You practiced crawling over there. Remember Yurek and how you got to him? Do the same thing here."

"But Father", I said, "here there is no Yurek- no Sarah, no Fania, no Dantshka."

"Don't worry, son. God is there on both sides of the fence. He'll be waiting for you, guiding you to safety. As soon as you get out of the camp, run to the nearest forest. And join the partisan movement. And then you'll have a chance to practice what you preached. Now in case they evacuate just shoemakers, not the whole camp, don't try to escape. You'll have the same opportunity to escape later. Remember, help yourself, and God will stretch out His arms and help you."

When we reached the shop after roll call, we learned that men were caught trying to escape. The punishment for this crime was execution in front of the entire camp. Because no one wanted to be in the front line, a great deal of shuffling took place. Father and I found ourselves in the center facing the two condemned men. They were brought in, hands and feet bound. I recognized them immediately. They had been at my Bar Mitzvah and it was they who had brought me the beautiful overcoat that kept me warm during the cold days and nights. The executioner was the Nazi whom I'd encountered at the entrance to the potato cellar. We called him "Rontshka"- Hand in Polish- because his left hand was amputated and was covered with a black glove.

I tried to wave to the condemned men; I hoped they would recognize me. But Father quickly lowered my hand. I wanted to pray but did not know what to say. The only words I could think of at that moment were; "Mode Ani Lefonekho...- I thank you, oh God... for restoring my soul to me..." and "Shema Yisroel...- Hear oh Israel, the Lord our God is One". These are the prayers I recited every morning when I rose. The men stood there erect. They did not beg or cry, but looked rather proud when the shots were fired into the right temples of their heads. I had never before witnessed an execution. It left an indelible impression on me.

Rumors circulated that Camp Blizin would be liquidated. We were told that shoemakers were needed in another camp. They loaded us up on trucks and brought us to the train station where they gave us some food ration. After a few hours of traveling, we got off at the camp Plashow- located near Cracow.

Shortly after our arrival, truckloads of priests with their congregations were brought into the camp. They were all dressed up in Sunday clothing, the priests in their garbs. For a while it looked like they were going for an outing, but we soon found out this was not so.

They were separated. The priests were lined up around the fences in front of the watch towers. Keeping an eye on them were the guards with automatic weapons ready to shoot at the slightest provocation. The civilians were taken to an expedition place

called Niesza Gourka where they were shot one by one. The priests stood in one spot for hours- until they fell to the ground.

The camp inmates tried very much to help them but were chased away by the guards. We soon found out the reason for this mass round up: the population of Warsaw -the capital of Poland- was revolting. The revolt was spreading, and the Russian army was at the outskirts of Warsaw.

The Russians were preparing an all out offensive; soon we would be free. All those rumors gave us some hope. But it was too late for my father. His legs and face were bloated and he was finally hospitalized. I stayed around the hospital fence as long as I possibly could- until I was chased away by the hospital guards. Stories were rampant that Plashow was going to be evacuated because the front was getting closer. One day the evacuation really started. Our new destination was unknown. I immediately rushed to the hospital to see my father and to consult with him about the escape. But I changed my mind. Now, I thought, he really needs me. When I finally located him, I found he was in no condition to walk. The patients were carried in stretchers to the waiting trucks. On the way to the railroad station, we were crowded into box cars. We arrived half dead at a station called Mathausen. Father was carried by four men and I as the fifth held his head until we reached the camp. The sick and helpless were separated from the rest of us and my father was among those taken away.

We were driven into a huge area, surrounded by high walls. A long line was formed and prison uniforms were given out. I kept on sneaking out from the front of the line to the end of the line so I could be with Father a little longer. The guard kept on chasing me away from Father, and I kept on running back. This went on until the line became shorter and shorter, and at last I found myself the only one in that huge place. I took a last look my father. Then the guard hit me with his whip.

I begged the guard to let me stay with Father. “He needs me, He need me," I kept on saying.

He said: “He’ll need you no more.”

My father was now a body that could not move, a face full of pain, cries without tears. He lifted his weak arms to Heaven, his lips trembled in prayer. He did glance at me, a glance that will haunt the last of my days.

I was devastated and lost. I was in shock. I started to scream for him and talk to him -and to myself. I was losing my mind.

CHAPTER 14- CAMP MATHAUSEN

They chased us into the quarantine barracks and we left my father behind. A deep longing for my father constricted my heart; I couldn't get him out of my mind. I missed him day and night. Every step I stood, my father stood before me and I missed him always. I looked for him in each barrack, but I couldn't find him. I became perplexed and lost, and I fell sick. I began to speak to my father in the dark of night on my wooden plank. I complained that he had disappeared on me. And that's how I fell asleep.

And in my dream, we screamed. They tore at us with leather whips, and began beating us. They herded us together, and then rode with us further into the distance. In the packed wagon, there was no room- not to sit and not to stand. I was the youngest and the smallest there, so I saw only halves of bodies. I was seized with terror and began to scream for my mother and father.

"Your father isn't here", a voice said. "He was left behind in the camp."

"Why was he left behind?", I wanted to know.

He didn't want to answer. A pair of hands stroked my blond hair and begged me to stop screaming. "The God of all glory heard your scream; He'll return your father to you."

I could no longer stand on my feet; I fell among the standing bodies. The man of the voice picked me off the floor and continued to speak to me:

"You must understand, my child, that you'll never see your father again. And let me tell you something: that man wearing the S.S. uniform was not a German, but a messenger of God who watched over you and let you live through the bad times so you could tell of it in good times. So give me your hand and let me help you."

CHAPTER 15- On My Own

From Mathausen, we were transported to Camp Melk. There we worked solely on building military factories deep underground to avoid bombings. I was too small to be taken to work in the mines, so I was assigned to dig trenches and shelters in the camp proper.

Seemingly out of nowhere, hundreds of American bombers appeared. The sky was filled with them. Everything shook as they flew by, so loud was the roar of their motors. They dropped silvery filaments until the entire area was covered with these metal-like thin strips. We were told that this was used to confuse the Germans in their attempts to shoot down the planes. It was wonderful to hear the planes and watch their great efficiency. It gave us hope and strangely, it resembled Smolensk. But there I had my father to share that wonderful experience. I missed him everywhere- but especially here. I gathered a handful of those silvery threads and kept them close to my body. I didn't part with them until they crumbled. On the first Sunday in camp, I looked around and tried to find possibilities for escape. But it seemed impossible. The whole place was fenced in with electric wiring. Touching any part meant instant electrocution. I learned later that many of the inmates committed suicide on those wires. Watch towers and guards were on duty 24 hours a day. Camp Melk was called the "International Camp" and quite appropriately. The inmates were Spanish, French, Germans, Austrians, Russians among others. Most of them political prisoners, but among them were also criminals, murderers and homosexuals. We all wore one uniform- blue and white stripes with a K-2 number sewn on. Some authority was given to the German criminals and life was accordingly miserable. To flee was impossible. I was frightened. As I walked around, I found myself talking to my father, and then I realized that he was not with me. I cried until I came back to my barrack.

I climbed up to my bunk and sang a very sad song: "Omro ya omro ya pacharonatch menia e radneie nie uznaut dse mogela moya- I'll die, I'll die and they'll bury me, and my family will not know where to look for my grave." Listening to me was a Russian Capo, one of the most feared in the camp. His name was Misha and he was a Captain in the Russian Army. I heard a voice from somewhere, asking me where I came from. I said I was a Russian Jew from somewhere close to Minsk. I said that my father had been left behind in Mathausen and that I missed him very much. I asked how I could bring my father back to me. He smiled and requested that I sing the song again, and I did. He was very surprised to see a Russian Jew. He told his subordinates not to beat me and to give me some left over soup, and they did. As a result of this encounter, I sort of became one of their own. They called me Sashka. They removed the J from the triangle which was sewn on my K2 prison garb, and replaced it with an R - for "Rusky"- Russian. That helped a little. A Russian prisoner was not beaten as often as a Jew. The J -which stood for Jude- Jew-, made you vulnerable. After that, no one seized my meager portion of bread. That small favor and the constant welcome visitors- the American Air Force- put me in a better mood- but not for long.

One day the Russian Capo who liked my song called me over. His face was red with anger. He accused me of lying to him: I was not a "Ruski Yevrei- a Russian

Hebrew-", but a Polish "zhzid- Jew". "All the Jews are liars", he said. He checked my K2 (ID) number and it proved I was a liar. "Nobody lies to me", he said. I tried to explain that if we had told the Germans that we were Russian, they would have killed us,- as they did the rest of Russian Hebrews. But what I said made no sense to him. His face turned crimson with anger and he seemed ready to torture me. I backed off a few steps, and I stopped. I raised my right hand, stood erect like a soldier, and saluted. I then started to recite the Pioneer Oath- "Ya uni pioner sousa sovietcki...." It stopped him dead in his track. I recited and continued looking straight into his wild eyes. He backed off, his anger subsided. He listened to my communist oath and I saluted again. His hand shook when he touched my shoulder. "With that", he said, "you've convinced me: you are indeed a Russian Hebrew." To this day I don't know what prompted me to do what I did. I know only that it worked.

In 1939, when the Soviets invaded part of Poland and I still went to school, I joined the Pioneer Movement. For me, it was an organization similar to the American Boy Scouts. I never dreamed that one day the pioneer oath would save my life.

Because my father was always on my mind, I believed he would come back to me whenever I was asleep. I felt happy, therefore, when I could lie down. That's when Father would be near me. One night I was rudely awakened. They seized me for work at the underground tunnel. We were counted at the gate, and walked 15 in a line to the station. We rode by train for an hour or so, and came directly to that area. We were checked again, and jobs were assigned to us in due time. This mass of humans disappeared deep into the underground tunnel, digging and moving on conveyers loaded with earth. The only ones left above ground were young boys my of age who had just arrived from Budapest. We were assigned to carry "shpitzen"- (literally, little pointy bits) or scrap. Our official name therefore was "shpitzentreger- scrap carriers". Our job was to pick up sharp pieces at the blacksmith shop- which was located outside of the tunnel- and carry them to a designated tunnel to specific air hammers. We also delivered other scrap that needed sharpening back to the smithy. The pieces of metal were heavy and dangled from our shoulders. My body suffered from sores and scratches and my shoulders ached. A huge factory complex was being erected underground. Trucks and trains arrived and departed in both directions. A variety of military components were manufactured and new tunnels were in the works. The whole camp of Melk -with its tens of thousands of inmates- was assigned to this project. No one knows how many perished from hunger, abuse and hard work. Our work outside of the tunnel was just as difficult, but we had a great deal of satisfaction. We were the first ones to hear the sirens alerting us to the arrival of the American bombers. I glanced at them before I ran underground. Many bombs were dropped on those mountains. The Allies were obviously trying to bombard this huge and important military complex. But they hardly affected us.

I belonged to the underground without knowing it. On one of my deliveries of scrap metal, I tripped and fell. This was not unusual; it happened many times. But on this occasion, one of my pieces broke, and from it, I noticed, a small piece of paper fell out. It had writing on it. I hid the paper in my shoe. Then I collected my bits of scrap metal, straightened them out, placed them back on my shoulder, threw the broken one in a pile of rubbish and headed for the smith shop. This area was

controlled by French prisoners- in a manner of speaking. I seldom saw a German there, and next to the shop an Austrian engineer officers kept all sorts of plans. While waiting for my scrap metal, I would help a civilian take care of the stove. This civilian engineer was a kind man. He would give something to the us "shpitzentreger". He gave me a pair of shoes because, he said, he felt compassion for the young. The Frenchman's name was "Shak". He spoke German with a French accent. He was the one who prepared my scrap metal.

I grabbed his hand. "I must go to the toilet", I said. "I have something to tell you." I held my stomach, indicating the urgency. He opened the door for me and I almost dragged him in and I told him what had happened. I handed him the note. He paled. I assured him that no one saw what I did. It took me only a second to hide it; there was no Nazi in sight and no Capo was in the area. He interrogated me extensively. I kept reassuring him, until he finally believed me. We became good friends. On occasion I would ask him if there was anything else I could do. He would smile, and kiss me on my forehead tearfully. I never questioned him. He would hand me the sharpened scrap, smile, and look into my eyes. Not a word was uttered. In camp I noticed an increased number of Capos standing at the electric fence, watched by a Nazi in the tower. They were visibly shaken and had obviously been badly beaten. Rumors circulated that English commandos were among us and with all these stories, and the constant surveillance of the American Air Force, we had renewed hope of imminent liberation.

Conditions in the camp deteriorated. The winter of 1944 was rapidly approaching and we "shpitzentregers" tried to spend as much time as possible in the tunnels to protect ourselves from the bitter cold. Back in camp we would stand for hours in the frigid weather for the roll count. It was devastating; men were dropping and dying. I don't know how I survived.

The terrible winter passed. The work in the deep underground continued in the same way and with the same atrocities. One act of sabotage finally took place and thousands of inmates, Germans and civilians, were caught up in it. The morning shift of which I was a part, arrived at the work site and we were counted. The night shift left the tunnels and they too stood at some distance ready to depart. They had already been counted; this was the change of shift. We were coming to work; they were returning to camp. The exchange of positions had already taken place. Hundreds were already in the tunnels- all were there except for the shpitzentregers. There were 10 or 15 minutes till the entire mass of men would vacate the square and disappear in the deep underground to their assigned places. While this was taking place, the sirens sounded. But no planes were in sight. As we came closer to the tunnel, a strong burning odor filled the air, followed by heavy smoke that poured out of the tunnel. A tragedy was in the making. Hundreds of our people perished- as did some civilians. The Germans entered the tunnel with gas masks to direct the rescue. The only ones who survived were those near the exits. The work in the tunnels slowed down significantly. The night shift was eliminated, and good news was circulating. The war, they said, was coming to an end. I heard this from the Austrian insiders who helped the shpitzentreger in various ways.

Spring was approaching. The fresh air wafted from the high Alps, the few lonely leafless trees opened their buds to replenish their colorful foliage. Spring instilled new hope in me, but not for long. We were being evacuated. They took us to barges. The holds were open, we were driven down, and sealed off in the belly of the barge. There were many of us in there in the dark, without any food. The only light we had, filtered in when they opened the hold to remove the dead. I tried to find space near that ladder, and finally succeeded. I tried with all my might to hold on to this ladder for a little air and a glimpse of daylight. I resolved to stand my ground no matter what might happen. I prayed constantly, beseeching God to give me strength to hold on. He did not forsake me. I finally fell asleep among the squashed bodies. Thankfully, my father was right there with me. I cried in my sleep so profusely that it woke me. I realized that I was dreaming but I did not care. I fell asleep again and there was Father climbing up and down the ladder opening and closing the hold while carrying me on his shoulders. What a wonderful dream! It really strengthened me.

Many more bodies were taken out of that dungeon and thrown into the river Danau. I helped remove the bodies. In so doing, I inhaled all the fresh air I wanted. Once on deck, I immediately grabbed a broom that was close at hand and started to sweep. The German guard who watched did not mind. He smiled while he chased the next poor soul back into the dungeon. After getting rid of the dead, I remained on deck with the guards and some civilians. In the kitchen, food was being prepared for the civilians. The civilian did not take his eye off me. He handed me a potato peeler and motioned to me to start peeling. I was an expert at that (Back home I had been Mother's helper. Potatoes were the staple of our diet, and my mother always gave me that honor of peeling them). The guard smiled. He was pleased with my speed in peeling potatoes. He checked the peel, and said, “That's good. That's good, young man." The civilian smiled approvingly. Leftover food was given to me. The civilian gave me his drink and I kept on eating until I could not eat any more. The civilian kept me busy and the guard did not mind. For a moment I forgot where I was and where I was going.

I became hypnotized with the beauty of the Danau and its surroundings. I felt free like a bird soaring in the air looking at the world below. I started to talk to my father in whispers. “Come out dear Father from that dungeon. Share the fresh air with me; there is enough of it for both of us. Put your hand in mine just like that. Let’s bask in the majesty of this blue water moving free and restlessly. Yes, this is the mighty Danau. I remember my school days - we had to find this river on the map. Oh how I loved geography. Austria and its people, Salzburg and Mozart. Here we are - look how tall those mountains are. Yes, those are the Alps, the tips covered with snow. They reach all the way to Heaven; let's try to climb them. Oh don't worry, we'll be careful. We'll hold on to each other. Let's climb hm? How come you are so quiet? Don’t you see what I see? Look around you there is the shore and people are walking freely. We are also free. We are on the Danau taking a ride like all those hundreds of people. See, our boat is almost touching theirs."

I kept on talking to Father. He responded with a song. It was very familiar. We sang this song many times together when the Russian planes would attack the German position in Camp Smolensk: Al tiro mipakhad pisom

Umeshoias resho-im key sovo
Utzu eytso vesufor
Dabru dovor velo yokum
Key imonu el

Fear not a sudden fright/ and the doom of the evil-ones when it comes/ (let them) take advice, and it will be annulled/(let them) decide a thing and it will not be/ for God is with us

My dream came to an end as soon as I heard the familiar sound of oncoming planes. Out of nowhere hundreds of American planes appeared on the horizon and here they were over my head. I was afraid to laugh and applaud. But my dream was complete.

When it got dark, I had to descend into the dungeon. In the morning, the German would open up the hold and scream "young man"." A few men tried to push through. The German simply pushed them down with his foot; I was wanted. So I was once again on deck with the broom, making myself useful. One time I noticed a bag of beets. I showed the guard how rotten they were. I shoved them down the hold. There were onions, too, and other produce, that wasn't really rotten. Only a few items on the top were bad and smelly. I did my best to throw down the hold whatever was edible. One civilian German pushed over a bag of what looked like coal. I tasted it. It was crunchy, and chewable. He said; "It's good, it's good." It had a sort of buttery taste, so I threw some down below. Of course down below no one knew who was responsible for the throw-aways. I learned later that this "coal" cured dysentery. In fact some of those who had too much of it became constipated.

The Danau was jammed with barges and luxury craft all moving in one direction. Dead bodies floated, then disappeared in the distance. I overheard some talk. We were getting closer to our destination; it sounded like Lintz. So far I'd been fortunate. Some thoughts of escape entered my mind at the last moment. I thought of jumping into the water, but the sight of so many dead bodies floating around, stopped me. I began preparing for the next encounter. The first thing that entered my mind was to procure food. The only place I could possibly conceal it, would be in my pants. So I tied the bottoms of my pants and was able to conceal some baked potatoes. I threw them into my pants along with some onions. Whatever will be, will be, I told myself. At least I have some food.

It was mid-day when we were ordered out of the dungeon. It was a terrible sight: a battered mass of people gasping for breath, soaked in sweat and blinded by sudden daylight. The barge was emptied and the dead were thrown into the Danau. Our destination, we were told, was Ebensee. We started on foot. The first stop was Lintz. The march was deadly. It felt like torture and it lasted several days. Finally we arrived at the camp. It was a vast place. People were brought in from different areas. They wandered about aimlessly until they fell and died. This was the worst place I had been in. With hardly any food, cannibalism took place. There was no discipline. When my supply of potatoes was depleted, I searched for food. There was none to be found.

A group of inmates were ready to go to work. Without much thinking, I joined them. They took us to a nearby town called "Atnang Puchenheim". This was a central railroad station and the American Air Force had razed the entire area. We had to clean it up. But we had no strength. Beatings did not help. Some of the civilians who watched the beatings, called out: "It's all over. Stop the beatings." But that didn't help. The few of us who were still alive were brought to camp reeling from hunger, completely exhausted.

When we arrived back in camp, I made it to the nearest bunk in some barrack and dropped exhausted. After that incident my hunger seemed to subside. I was thirsty, my two new found friends (with whom I shared the bunk) tried very earnestly to help
me. The only thing they had was cold water. They encouraged me to swallow. I tried to rise and leave the smelly barrack but I just could not stand. I was very dizzy, my feet became so heavy, I could not bend my knees. My bunk mates made some room for me, so I could stretch out . I was grateful for their kindness. The only thing I wanted was to fall asleep and commune with my father. I remember my last dream quite vividly. Yes, my father was with me as always, but he surprised me. He appeared with our entire family, my oldest sister Yentel was there, and Sarah walked in holding her young sister Merre-Liebe by one hand and her little brother Itzik by the other, Mother and **Bobie** were embracing me. **Zeyde**, who was all dressed in his Sabbath finery was followed by the members of the **khevre kadishe**. They all surrounded me. My **Zeyde** picked me up, placed me on his shoulders and began to dance in a circle. My four siblings followed suit. The dancing continued and food and drinks were plentiful. Mother and Father held hands and applauded enthusiastically. While all of this was going on, I was awakened by my two newly found friends. I protested. This was the first time since I left my birthplace that I was together with my entire family and I was having a wonderful time. "Why, oh why did you have to wake me?" I wanted to know.

"Your dream was a reality for you, but for us, hearing you cry so bitterly, seeing your body so convulsed, it was frightening. We were afraid something dire might happen to you, so we had to wake you." They were brothers. Zelig, the oldest, was about 30, and Itzik, the youngest, was about 25. They came from Plashow and had sort of adopted me. They carefully lifted me so as not to break or injure my tender bones and carried me out of the barrack into the fresh air.

These were my last 3 days in camp before liberation.

CHAPTER 16

My legs, swollen,
My body, weary, brittle
Skin covering bones,
Head spinning so that I could not stand nor walk,
Eyes out of focus,
Suddenly I hear a voice --
So weak it is barely audible --
Coming from a hard plank bed.

As he speaks the voice gains strength:
"Let us all rise and display some signs of life.
Get up from the filthy plank and go out into the air,"
Pleaded our friend as he cried bitterly.

Much as I wished I could, I was unable to leave my bed. "Let me lie here in peace."

"We must all help him to get on his feet. Let us gather our strength, fill our lungs with fresh air. Perhaps the sun's rays will brighten our faces and endow us with vigor."

Standing on shaky legs, with a loudly pounding heart, I felt a cold hand caressing my wrinkled skin.

"Stay close to each other," the brave, weary voice urged. "Let no one fall."

My eyes were able to focus again. The will to live grew strong within me. The dizziness subsided and I could stand again .

Before me, was revealed a magnificent panorama- an amalgam of beauty and majesty: tall snowcapped mountains, their summits piercing the clouds, the sun brightening the snow. Birds soaring at will, chirping their hymns to God. Winds rustling through the trees paying homage to the Almighty.

Our bodies were covered with rags and soaked by the spring rain,
Our mouths open, and our tongues extended
To catch the errant raindrops in the free air.

His brave words instilled hope within us.
He strengthened us with his very existence.
His voice soon grew weak and soon there was silence,
Casting us into deep sorrow.

Falling to the ground he wept tearlessly
And was gone.

"Let us together, in unison
Recite the **Kadish**.
May his soul enter Paradise
And may he intercede bravely
In behalf of our suffering people,
And guide us to our blessed homeland
And may his skin and bones bear witness
To the pain and misery we endured

The deadly barbed wire,
The German guards with their firearms aimed at us,
Vicious dogs at their sides,
Our lifeless bodies, our tortured souls.

Me-ayin yovo ezri?
Where will my salvation come from?

God in Heaven, reveal thy miracles,
Part the sharp wire fences
Punish the German murderers."

Under the date of January 26, 1942 my sister wrote in her diary: "Oh, God, delivery us from our travail! Why must we Jews be so persecuted, driven from one place to another? Can'st thou witness such torture, such spilling of Jewish blood and still remain silent?"

Unable to walk to the barrack, we had to lie where we were on the cold ground. A loud buzzing filled the air. The Americans were approaching in their tanks to set us free. We did not have the strength to rejoice. Food and drink were provided, but there were many for whom it was too late. They died in the camp.

I soon felt more like myself. The American commander ordered us to line up according to nationality. Jews comprised the smallest group. He asked us to sing "**Hatikvah**" and we did so gladly with our last bit of strength. Those standing, those lying, those half alive or dying, -all sang the Jewish national anthem entitled "hope".

The officer stood at attention. Tears streamed down his face. He stood atop his tank and joined us in song.

Shortly afterward, we were taken to a Displaced Persons Camp. We'd left the death camps behind us.

A DESTINY: BUT WHY WAS IT MINE?

By Jacob Fishkin

Translated by Eva Zeitlin Dobkin

On May fifth, 1945 the death camp Ebensee was liberated by the American forces. I was one of the living dead who was freed there. The first thing on my mind was to find my father, but he was not in the vicinity of the camp. I decided to search through the Displaced Persons (D.P.) camps for him and other members of my family.

As soon as I was able to cover my bones with some flesh, I traveled to Linz, a city in Austria, in which there was the Jewish D.P. camp, Bindermekel. I stopped at a station called Atnang-Pakenheim, where I found large numbers of hurrying people.

After nearly four years in eleven concentration camps, it felt wonderful to be free to go anywhere I wished. As I moved about, feeling lost in the throng of people, someone tapped me on my shoulder and I heard a man's voice calling my name: "Yankev!"

At first I thought that this must be some crazy joke. Then I said to myself, "Could it be my father?"

I turned around and saw a familiar face, but could not place it. :He was from my **shtetl**, Rubzewicz. His name was Benyomin and he was a former neighbor of ours His family lived across the street from mine and my sister Sarah was a close friend of his sister Masha. In her diary, Sarah wrote about Masha.

After much hugging, and crying for joy and sadness, Benyomin told me that the only survivors of my large family were my mother's sister Rokhl, her husband, and their two children. Benyomin then added:

"Your aunt has your sister's diary. She will tell you all about it. You Must go to Fernwald, in Germany. That is where they are now."

Rokhl was my mother's younger sister. Of the seven children in their family, all but Rokhl perished. Her husband's name was Yankl and their sons were Arye and Benyomin.

It was 1946. My first Passover as a newly liberated free young man. I arrived at Rokh'ls home just in time for the Seder. (I had to sneak across the German border to reach my aunt.)

Now all five of us were sitting together celebrating the Seder ritual- the Passover ritual dinner.

It was a very emotional moment when Rokhl brought out my sister's diary and placed it on an empty chair next to mine. There was no way we could stop crying, no matter how much we tried.

And then the story of "A Destiny: But Why Was It Mine?" unfolded.

How did it all come about? My aunt Rokhl began the story:

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When the liquidation of Dworetz began, Rokhl, her husband and their boys hid in a camouflaged double wall built by our townsmen.

"After the massacre, we emerged from our hiding place
And into the darkness of night
To find our way into the woods was our aim,
There to hide from the Germans.
We found many more Jews in the woods
And with them we immediately began to plan
How to remain alive.
Our decision: we must hurry home. Home to our shtetl.
We trudged through the woods by day and night.
With no food or drink to facilitate our journey
Until we were once again in Rubzewicz.

But, alas, there was no Jew in sight.

Without much thought we went back into the night
We must go, back into the woods:
To become partisans now seemed the right thing to do.
What we needed we were able to obtain
And there among the sheltering trees we found
people like ourselves.
There were trenches ready for us
And we erected an earthen chamber."

"To our trench came the command
Quietly, creating no fuss,
Back to Rubzewicz we had to go,

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To locate the Germans."

Silently, Rokhl entered our old dwelling

And there, in the rubble,

She discovered Sarah's diary.

"I encountered no Germans in the town,

And promptly started to march back to the forest.

In a dark, wet area I found a shelter and paused briefly.

I escaped many raids on my way,

At all times keeping the diary

Strapped to my body.

Between battles, the Jewish partisans,

Heroic fighters from various bunkers,

Read Sarah's writings, turning the pages,

Touched by her words. For they provided sustenance,

Raising our spirits, urging us not to lose hope

And faith in our God."

The Passover table was set.

The lovely Rokhl, gentle mother, rose

To light the candles and recite the blessing.

The four questions were asked:

"How does this night differ from all others?"

The Passover night we shall read two **Haggadahs**.

The first, Exodus from Egypt,

Then, the Exodus from Europe.

We'll speak of God's miracles

Right here in this Hitler land,

of the modern Pharaoh, slayer of Jews.

The Pharaoh of long ago deserved his end,

Earned it for enslaving our people

And drowning our children.

He plagued his subjects with abscesses,

And the mighty Egyptian was engulfed by the sea.

once again God, performed His miracle,

And parted the sea to free His people.

He prepared a home for His people,

And started to lead us there

Through hill and dale and whirling winds,

Through hot days, cold nights and sand storms.

In the vast emptiness of the ~~forest~~ בְּמִדְבָּר

He found water and manna for us.

Up to Mount of Sinai did He lead us

And presented us with the Holy Torah.

He led us home to our land,

A sweet and lovely place

Flowing with milk and honey.

A land of beauty and splendor

Built by prophets and kings,

By high priests and by ordinary people

Who lived and laughed

And to remember their Lord in Heaven they soon forgot.

The father, angered by His children,

Sent them forth from the Holy Land

Dispersing them to the four corners of the earth,

And there they toiled for men of wealth.

"Yes, for their sins He punished them,

But never did He forsake them," Rokhl reminded us.

The refined, patient Jewish mother raised Sarah's diary

And began to turn its pages.

"Here is a poem by my sister, Shoshke, Sarah's mother. She wrote it when she was a leader in the **Bund** organization. Shoshke. passed the poem on to her daughter, Sarah. And so it became part of the diary. It is called "Oh, take not,". Yankev, our guest, our child, will read it to us. But now, we shall all participate in reading the **Haggadah** of the Exodus from Europe, where we all were enslaved by the German pharaoh.

I read: "Oh, take not from me my silvery dream

But let me drown my sorrows in its gleam.

I have tasted no joy in reality...

In dreams, then, let forgetfulness come to me!

Oh, let me spin out my fancies of silver!

In dreams let my spirit run free.

With no space in my life for my desire ...

At least let me dream and, dreaming, expire!"

"God punished the Pharaoh of Egypt," continued Rokhl, "and those events have all been recorded. A new Pharaoh arose to lead the Germans, and their goal was to destroy all Jews. With aircraft, ships and with tanks that churned the earth. As they roved about, the Germans conquered and enslaved many nations and set about annihilating the Jews."

"God did not allow the murderous Hitler and his Nazis to go unpunished, but visited new plagues upon them. A horde of bird- like flying machines of strong metal burst through the skies, blocked the sun and panicked Germans. Clusters of bombs rained down, devastating cities and villages. Mighty dams were shattered and loosed, leaving raging waters to inundate field and forest- causing hunger and need among the Germans. Their mighty armies were drowned in blood or taken prisoners. Hitler, their Fuehrer, took his own life. His henchmen were hanged like **Hamans**. Thus did God punish the German pharaoh. All of this has been written into the records of the Nuremberg trials, lest the world forget."

A tear adorned her lovely face

And a smile appeared on her lips

When Rokhl began to recite Sarah's prophecy

Of Thursday, July twenty-fourth, 1941, in Rubzewicz:

... "We Jews do not despair. The prayers will reach the King of Kings and He will put an end to the terrible suffering of His tormented people. Some day the future may brighten and joy will pave the road across the Jordan and into **Eretz Yisroel**."

"'Yes, many will fall, there will still be many more trials and much blood shed by Jews, but we shall survive that too. The Jews shall emerge victorious and Truth shall bare all ....

Then Rokhl turned to another entry:

"Wednesday, 29th April 1942

... Every blade of grass has a mother, every leaf is cradled in the comforting arms of the wind, but no blade of grass and no leaf is ever cuddled as long against a warm mother's breasts as is the deep, shadow-filled green of the woods in that Eastern land,- our land, where the sun shines. There, people live free and, happily even now. There the waters irrigate the fertile black fields. There, the budding fruit glistens before one's eyes; and the lovely golden sheaves change color as one looks at them bring joy, nourishment and fill one with much pride. The hearts of thousands of those still alive in the dark Diaspora strain towards that land. The children who remain long for that earth. The tortured, plagued and scorned Jews strive to reach the breast of that mother. We are parched from suffering. Our eyes are drained of tears as we await the amelioration of our plight.,

Rokhl continued her second Passover account:

"Once again the Heavenly Father
Performed His wonders and led His people home.
From the four corners of the earth
He gathered His children
And brought them home on wings of steel.
From ghetto prisons, camouflaged cellars, Siberian cold,
From dense woods and Christian cloisters,
From homes of gentiles where they hid--
Jewish soldiers from partisan trenches,

Wounded Jewish fighters and sound ones

From gentile lands--

Battle weary, they climbed mountains

And rode mules.

Ships, barely able to stay afloat

Running blockades on the rolling seas

To return people to their homes

To fight for and to build our land."

Rokhl wiped a tear from her face,

And combed her wavy hair.

Her table was set with fruits and flowers,

matzoth, sweet **charoses** and bitter radish,

And crystal glasses filled with wine.

We ate and drank, sang the song of the one Kid,

And praised our Father in Heaven.

Elijah's cup was filled. The door opened

For the Prophet to enter.

Once again, we welcomed him with song:

Eli.yohu hanavi,

Eli.yohu hatishbi ...

Long into the night the Seder continued

And then it was time for repose.

Rokhl, however, could find no rest.

Softly, on tiptoe, waking no one,

She came to where I lay.

"Dear Rokhl, as you see, I cannot rest.

I must tell you of the miracles that kept me alive."

"Tell me, tell me, child," she whispered gently.

Night was almost gone when Rokhl once again

Opened the diary

Tenderly, she turned its pages.

"One entry of Sarah gives me no solace,

Keeps robbing me of sleep.

I'd like you to read that page to me."

(The curtain was drawn, the lamp lit.)

"The date was March twenty-sixth, 1942

And this is what she writes:

"'Who can tell what will happen to my diary?'

I read:

"Thursday, 26th March, 1942

From Today, there is one week to Passover

And praise be to God for his mercy, for He has kept us alive through yesterday and today and we pray He continues to perform miracles for us. These days bring with them serious problems. A great many lives are at stake. People rush to the houses of prayer crying out and imploring Him to turn away the baleful tide of

despair. Everyone seems to have lost their heads. No one sees the bright sun. All one can perceive and imagine is the sinister end to our lives. We see before us a long, deep ditch waiting to receive us. We recognize our enemies, and their delight in our grief. They laugh and find our sadness amusing. It is as if someone were cutting our hearts with a dull saw. We stay indoors, afraid to go out into the street. Ah! How sad is our plight, how tragic that we contemplate the imminent end of our lives. Who can tell whether we'll live to greet the next morning' s: tomorrow or even be able to think about anything? It is even futile to prepare for Passover, seven days hence. Who knows what will happen during the interim. Perhaps we shall live and overcome our travail. But closer to our thinking is the unbearable wait for death.

"Ah, Death! How everyone fears and despises you! We would normally welcome you with outstretched arms if you came for us while we slept. That end would be good.

"But it is deplorable when you are called upon to take our few remaining Jews. That is Hitler's and the Devil's final solution. And You, Almighty one, remain silent and do not rescue Your children.

"By now, few have the strength to endure. And who can remain indifferent to such an ugly demise? Life is so beautiful when there is no reason to contemplate an early death. When happy thoughts are dominant, there are only minor troubles to cope with. Why can't we lead normal lives and not cling to memories of the past, achieve our goals and approach our seventies alive? Yes, I am writing! Am I still living? Do I still function? Is my heart still beating and my youthfulness still apparent? Am I a normal being, still able to write? And are these, in truth, my final hours? I continue to write as I think: Who knows what will happen to my beloved diary? Where, dear diary, will some ill wind scatter

your pages tomorrow from the one who loves you? Who else will guard and treasure you as I do? You, too, will meet your end. You will probably be destroyed. Who will remember an eighteen-year-old who lived, and for a long time, almost seven years, recorded her various experiences? No one will even breathe a sigh for her. But you, my inscribed bits of paper, soaked through with bitter tears, will yearn and moan. But no! I shall not desert you, leave you to be abandoned in the fields where passerby who will pick you up, will then throw you away, or use you for personal needs. I shall not treat you that way. Nor shall I throw you into a fire that will consume you while I watch and weep. If I am still in control of my faculties, I will take you with me into the black grave of thousands, where you will rot along with me and all the others. Oh, how my heart pounds and aches at such thoughts, to prove that I am still alive and able to move and write about the final days of my life and all my Jewish brothers and sisters. Yes, how pained and bitter I feel as I speak to you, my unwritten page, and deplore your fate. And why do people not rue the fate of the many living?

Why do so few care about our rapid, unnatural decline? Why does no one exert any effort to ameliorate our situation? Yes, the world. is very bright, but what I see in it is only darkness, impenetrable fog and a sense of finality, sealed forever in a stygian mass grave.

"I can write no longer; I'm unable to move my hand. I feel that my heart which cannot bear such sad, final scenes, is gradually failing..."

"During these remaining few days I should like to talk with all of my acquaintances, to hear human speech, listen to a few words of comfort which might help to heal my thirsting soul. Sadly, no one speaks of any improvement. No one utter words of solace or of protest against our dying. All are silent, and everyone

weeps. Each is aware of the abnormality present in his or her pulse and heartbeat. Wild ideas surface, everything is de trop, one regards matters with a despairing and unfocused eye. Then we realize that Summer is approaching and all the little blades of grass will begin to sprout and strain to maintain life. All the icy waters will melt and the glorious sun will shine. Events will proceed in a normal manner. Once the thick layer of ice is gone, the fields will be covered by beautiful verdure. But where will we be? We will have been cut down, hurled alive and wounded into the pits. The ground will heave as black earth is freed by the shovels to cover us. And that will be become our sunshine, springtime and our liberation. The sun's rays will beam on our graves.

"Oh, God! Thou who-sees and knows all. Why not destroy the evil plans of our foes, dissipate their cruel sadistic plans and permit us to go on living? Spare us Father. Punish us for our transgressions, but not too harshly. Or--judge us Thyself and punish us all by Thine own hand. We are Your children. Thou did deliver us from Egypt. In the spirit of the approaching Passover which reminds us of that historic event, deliver us now, once again from the terrible fate our enemies would visit upon us. I end my confession in the fervent hope that Thou may be merciful and grant our desire to survive. Some day I may happily read all of this to my brothers and recall the terrible time when our collective deaths were imminent...."

A smile appeared on my aunt's sad face as she turned to me and spoke:

"Your experiences and mine, dear child, are closely related to Sarah's diary. We survived, not because we were stronger, better, wiser or more pious than all the many unfortunates. No. We live because it was, and is, our destiny to see to it that Sarah' s writings endure."

"Sarah was not the strongest among us, but she was the most religious, one of the worthiest of God's children. Up until the time she perished so tragically, she was deeply rooted in Jewishness and Godliness. Each word, each page of her writings is steeped in Jewish suffering, filled with deep love for our Holy Land."

"The greatness of God is woven into her **Agudah** talks, as is her love for His people. Not only did she speak of how she felt, she recorded it in her diary. She poured her deepest, innermost thoughts onto the pages of her beloved day by day accounts. She recorded her prayers. She desired and demanded justice for her people. She wrote of the sun, the moon and of the earth and its beauty. She conversed with the birds that sing and with the winds that howled, and asked them and her dead grandfather for a blessing. No, not for herself. She requested it for all of God's weary children."

"So you see, my child, God did read her secret feelings and He saved her diary from destruction."

"But He needed a messenger to find and protect the diary. Now, let us analyze how that was done.

"Your sister Yentl disappeared during the early days of the war, and as you know, your mother wept bitterly. When her two little ones, Yitskhok and Merre-Libbe, were taken from her in Ivenietz, she grieved until she became ill.

"Finally, when you and your father were separated from her, she lost her will to live. She died three days before Rosh Hashanna. That left Sarah alone, and that was more than she could bear. When the Germans surrounded the camp, I pleaded

with her to come with us to the camouflaged hiding place. At least we would be together."

"But Sarah did not heed my pleas. She absolutely refused to accompany us. "I'll share the fate of all the other Jews", she said. That was her wish, and that is what happened.,,

"As you see, my family survived. If my husband and children had been taken from me, I, too, would not have wanted to remain alive. But our Heavenly Father had other things in mind. He saved my family and led us back to Rubzewicz. He brought us into your house where, unawares, I picked up a copy book from a pile of trash. That was your sister's diary. Inside was a photograph of the pupils and teachers of her organization, "Bnos Agudas Yisroel" [Orthodox Daughters of Israel]. Now, I ask: was it not God's will that Sarah's words, be preserved?"

"True, the Almighty needed messengers. At the time, I was the one closest to Sarah, so I was chosen. I am the one to fulfill His assignment. I cherished the diary and carried it with me wherever I went, through many trials and tribulations, protecting it from rain and all other dangers.

"Indeed, as I see it, the diary was my salvation. Then you came to Germany and wrote to me explaining how you found me. That was when my assignment was completed."

"For, all along, the Almighty was readying a second emissary: you. However, you would not have survived without help. You needed someone close to you. God therefore obtain a third messenger, and that was your father, Dovid."

"Now, is it not interesting?" she continued. "You desperately needed your father for many reasons, and vice versa. Let's consider this first example: When the two of you went to Wolozin to get Sarah, you and your dad encountered the partisans. They mistook your father for a spy and were about to shoot him. It was only your crying and screaming that convinced them that he was really your father, and that they should let him go. On that occasion your father needed you to save his life."

"Here, now," she added, "is an example of a time when you needed your father's help: In the concentration camp not far from Lublin, you were standing near the chimneys one day. Your cousins Reuven and Godl were urging you to leave the train and come along with them, while your father wanted you to stay on the train with him. None of you knew which was the better choice. All the thousands who were there had gone to the area where the chimneys were, because they thought they were going to work in factories. Your father sensed it was not so. Once again God needed some one to point you in the right direction. That man was your father."

"Those were only two instances. Just think: You were in no fewer than eleven camps, in three--not quite four--long years, on death row, and you survived. Isn't that miraculous?" She closed her eyes and rested for a while. Then, once again, she turned some pages of the diary, stopping at the entry for May sixteenth, 1942. Only the date had been entered. There was nothing more on that page."

"Curious," said Rokhl. "It was during the fifth month, May, 1942 that we were driven from our homes and brought to Dworetz, where Sarah died. On May fifth, 1945 you were liberated from the death camp at Ebensee, Austria."

"So you see my child, you are not through with these paragraphs. It is your destiny to salvage Sarah's writings in perpetuity. True, your sister's young life was shortened, but her beloved diary will live on."

"Sarah entered a new date, but we could not continue, for we were driven, filled with fear and confusion, from our homes. She believed that we were about to be shot, so she hurriedly decided to leave the diary with your grandmother."

It must have been my destiny to survive because someone close to Sarah had to live if the purpose of continuing the saga- conceived at the tender young age of eleven and interrupted at eighteen-, was to be fulfilled. It had to be her younger brother, whom she loved, at times admired, and sometimes hated, it had to be someone who could open the diary and enter important details, episodes in our household, discussions on many matters in which we all participated --details no one else would know and to which Sarah did not refer although they were what influenced her young mind and heart.

Yes, it is my destiny. It was left for me to be the instrument through which Sarah's good words and deeds would be spread. I'll do it as long as my strength endures, and when it is gone, the younger generations of the family will carry the torch of our heritage. They will see to it that every Jewish child between the ages of eleven and eighteen studies Sarah's writings as exemplified in her diary, one that will become an integral part of their lives. It will become a source from which Jewish children will glean an understanding of Jewish martyrdom and its impact on the world.

Yes. they will have something to guide them after their school days are over. And they will covet it because Sarah's writing was a gift from God who gave her life and then took it away at such a tender age.

Fate has decreed that I carry on even though I find it difficult to write, knowing full well that I am not a capable practitioner of that craft. It was not easy for me to save enough money to pay for translating the diary from Yiddish into English, but I did it. I did manage to do it.

At this point my task is only partially accomplished. Now new aids are required to spread the message of the diary throughout the world. As time passes, those of us who were witnesses and victims of the Holocaust will be gone and there is a danger that many, even among our Jews, will know little about that cataclysmic era. It is, and will continue to be, important that at least all Jewish children, be acquainted with the facts about that tragic period.

Sarah's diary can become a significant part of such instruction. Moreover, it should have a special appeal for young people because it was written by a teenager at a time she was actually experiencing the tribulations about which she wrote, unlike many other accounts, written from memory years later. Every Jewish child's life will be enriched by this diary.

Once that is accomplished, it will not be difficult for me to leave this world. Then I shall take Sarah's hand and tell her that the wind did not scatter the pages of her story. The diary was well bound. I will tell her about all the helpers God prepared,

and about how Aunt Rokhl found her book.

I will inform her that among God's many heralds entrusted to spread her message, was a president of the United States, Ronald Reagan. In a speech he delivered at a cemetery in the German city of Bitburg, one heard and read around the world, he quoted your words, Sara, although he had no knowledge of your diary.

Then I'll let her know that all of her prophecies were fulfilled. The German Pharaoh was crushed. God is bringing His children home, as Sarah predicted. Many Jews will emigrate to Israel. Yes, your prognostications have come true, Sarah, including the one that the world would not believe what happened to our people. But your diary will bear witness and will serve as evidence. I did, indeed, experience the seven stages of hell but I survived.

Mother used to say we would beseech the Almighty to keep at least one member of our family alive. And that destiny was mine, I shall tell Sarah.

Glossary

1. Agudah- a religious organization- and political party- founded in Poland between the World Wars.
2. Bund- the Jewish socailist organization as it was known in Europe
3. Charoses- a sweet food served during the ritual meal (called the "seder") on Passover eve
4. Eli yohu..-. A song in Hebrew about the prophet Elijah
5. Eretz Yisroel- the Land of Israel
6. Haggadah- the book which is read during the seder on Passover eve
7. Haman(s)- an enemy of the Jews who wanted to destroy the Jewishpeople, but was himself destroyed

Glossary

Amalek(ites)- The nomadic nation that attacked the Israelites who escaped from bondage in Egypt. All enemies of the Jewish people are felt to be Amalekites.

Ato Bekhartonu- Literally "You chose us". One of the prayers said on Jewish Holidays.

Beilis trial- The trial that took place in Kiev in 1913, in which a Jew was falsely accused of murdering a Gentile boy. The accused, Menachem Mendel Beilis, was eventually acquitted.

Bema- The stand where the Torah is kept while it is read aloud in the synagogue.

Bereza-Kartuska- The prison camp in which Polish Bund members were incarcerated during the 1930s.

Betar- A Zionist youth movement which stresses self-defense as well as the acquisition of Hebrew language and culture and immigration ("aliyah") to Israel.

Beys Medresh- literally, house of study. The place where Jews assemble to learn Torah.

Beys Yakov- A religious school for girls

Biro-Bidjan- The area set aside by Soviet authorities ostensibly as a region of Jewsish autonomy.

Bobie- The Yiddish for "Grandma".

Bund (Bundistn)- The Jewish socialist party which stressed Jewish secular nationalism in Eastern Europe. The Bundistn (members of the Bund) saw themselves primarily as a labor movement. They did not attach importance to the establishment or the maintenance of a Jewish state in Israel.

Chmelnitsky- A man seen as a hero by Ukrainian nationalists but remembered in Jewish history as the man resposible for the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Jews.

Haftora(h)- The portion of the Prophets read on the Sabbath in the synagogue. Traditionally, a bar mitzva (boy) reads the haftorah in the synagogue on the Sabbath closest to his thirteenth birthday.

Haman- The enemy of the Jews mentioned in the book of Esther. Haman tried- unsuccesfully- to wipe out all the Jews in the Persian empire.

Haneros Halolu- Literally "these candles". A song sung on the Holiday ofChanukah.

Hatikva- Literally, "the hope". The song adopted as the national anthem of the Jewish state and used as such even before the official establishment of the state of Israel.

Judenrat- The Jewish council established by the Nazis in each town or city they occupied. The Judenrat mediated between the Jewish community and Nazi officials and carried out Nazi policies.

Kadish- The prayer said in memory of the dead.

Kedusho- literally, "sanctification". The prayer, a sanctification of God, is inserted into the eighteen benedictions when the cantor repeats the prayer aloud.

Khale- The special bread baked for the Sabbath

Kheder- The primary school for Jewish boys in Eastern Europe

Khevre Kadishe- The burial society

Kol Nidrei- literally "all the vows". The prayer said on Yom Kipur which annuls all the vows made during the previous year.

Kvas- A beer-like drink made from fermented cabbage

Mayim- The Hebrew word for "water".

Mezuzah- The scroll placed on the lintel of the door of a Jewish home. The scroll contains scriptual passages.

Mitzvah- A good deed.

Musef- The extra prayer added on to the morning prayer on Sabbaths and Holidays.

Pood(s)- A measure of weight equal to about 18 pounds.

Reb- The common Yiddish appendage to a man's name. Equivalent to "Mr."

Rebbitizin- The Rabbi's wife.

Shabes- The Yiddish word for "Sabbath".

Shloyme- The Yiddish pronunciation of the name "Solomon".

Shokhtim- Butchers, ritual slaughterers. (See "skhita").

Shtetl- The Yiddish word for "town".

Shul- The Yiddish word for "synagogue".

Sider- The Yiddish for "prayer book".

Skhite- Slaughter

Tallis- A prayer shawl

Tfilin- Also known as phylacteries. Two black leather boxes containing scriptual passages which are bound by black leather strips. They are worn on the hand and the head during morning prayer.

Tsikorive- A chicory drink

Yarmulke- Skull cap worn by religious men and boys

Yene Yatn- Literally "those folks". The name given to the Bund members whose activites were forbidden by the Soviet authorities.

Yeshiva- Talmudic academy

Yeshiva Bokher- A young man who is a student at the yeshiva

Yontev- The Yiddish for "holiday".

Zeyde- The Yiddish word for "Grandpa".

THE FATE OF THOSE MENTIONED IN THIS MEMOIR

Uncle Aaron- He and his five children were shot by the Germans.

Aunt Zelda- Died in the Minsk ghetto, along with her two sisters and their families.

Fania- Survived the war. She married and moved to Israel, where she raised a family.

Merre-Liebe, (9 years old), and Yitzkhok, (5 years old)-, My younger sister and brother were thrown into a pit in Ivenietz along with 650 other Jewish children.

Bobie- My grand-mother, (named Rivke-Henia), went along with the rest of the old and infirm to a pit dug in the Shimkowitz forest. On the Hebrew date of Khaf Sivan, she and the others were murdered there on the outskirts of Rubzewitz.

Lotte Eisenbad- The head of the Judenrat in Rubzewitz, led the old and sick of our town to their death. He walked at their head, wearing his **tallis** and **tfilin**.

Sarah Fishkin- My sister, was murdered Dec. 28, 1942, when camp Dworetz was liquidated.

Shoshke Fishkin- My mother, died 3 days before Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year in 1942.

David Fishkin- My father, was gassed (when already very ill) in Mathausen in 1944.